

Unveiling Shi'i Religious Identities: Case Studies of Hijab in
Culturally Homogeneous Canadian Schools

May Al-Fartousi

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate
Studies in Education

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Faculty of Education, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored 10 young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students' experiences associated with wearing the Hijab (headscarf) within their home, community, and predominantly White Canadian public elementary school environments. The study integrated several bodies of scholarly theories in order to examine the data under a set of comprehensive lenses that more fully articulates and theorizes on the diversity of female Shi'i Muslim Canadian students' experiences. These theories are: identity theories with a focus on religious identity and negative stereotypes associated with Muslims; feminism and the Hijab discourses; research pertaining to Muslims in school settings; and critical race theory. In order to readdress the dearth of information about Shi'is' experiences in schools, this study provides an in-depth case study analysis in which the methodology strategies included 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews, 2 focus-group meetings, and the incorporation of the researcher's fieldnotes. Data analysis revealed the following themes corresponding to participants' experiences and values in their social worlds of home, community, and schools: (a) martyrdom and self-sacrifice as a means for social justice; (b) transformational meaning of the Hijab; (c) intersectionality between culture, religion, and gender; and (d) effects of visits "back home" on participants' religious identities. Additional themes related to participants' school experiences included: (a) "us versus them" mentality; (b) religious and complex secular dialogues; (c) absence of Muslim representations in monocultural schools; (d) discrimination; (e) remaining silent versus speaking out; and (f) participants' strategies for preserving their identities. Recommendations are made to integrate Shi'i Muslim females' identity within the context of Islam and the West, most notably in relation to: (a) the role of Muslim community in

nondiverse settings as a space that advances and nurtures Shi'i Muslim identity; and (b) holistic and culturally responsive teaching that fosters respect of others' religiosity and spirituality. This study makes new inroads into feminist theorizing by drawing conceptual links between these previously unknown connections such as the impact of the historical female exemplary role model and the ritual stories on the experiences of Muslim females wearing the Hijab.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“I learnt from Hussein how to achieve victory while being oppressed”
~ Mahatma Gandhi¹

This qualitative case study documents the experiences of young female Shi’i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students who negotiate their identities while coming to terms with observing the Hijab, as a dress and behavioral code, within the contexts of their home, community, and predominantly White Canadian public elementary school environments. There are three overall aims in this introductory chapter: I first present a critical analysis of my identity as a Shi’i Muslim woman in which I relate my personal experiences as a Shi’i Muslim Arabic-Canadian graduate educator. By doing so, I link the challenges associated with my sociocultural background and beliefs in relation to my dissertation’s underlying goal: that of giving voice to minority Shi’i Muslim female students in Western settings. I also reiterate my sincere intention to remain respectful to the Shi’i religious values while maintaining and abiding by academic ethical standards. I then provide the background, purpose, and rationale for the present study. Finally, I discuss the importance of the study and outline the remainder of the document.

¹ I introduce this chapter with a citation from a non-Muslim about Imam Hussein as a sign of respect and gratitude for this great historical character who inspires me in my endeavour to document the experiences of the Shi’i minority group. The citation is derived from *Imam Husain: Quotes About and by Him*, retrieved from <http://www.al-islam.org/faq>.

Personal Interest and Positioning

This study's research design is informed by a gendered analysis of Muslim female identities. I examined how young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students negotiate their racial, cultural, and religious identities associated with wearing the Hijab within the context of predominantly White Canadian public elementary schools where the majority of the students are non-Muslims. As an insider, my point of entry into this research stems from my own schooling experiences as an Arab Muslim female student who has lived both in the Middle East and in Canada, and who has faced the pressures of social differences and racism.

As a Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian graduate educator, I at times experience a sense of apartness from my colleagues that is generated by differences that are twofold: first, those that are visible in terms of such personal attributes as my accent, my skin colour (i.e., race), and my clothing (i.e., my Hijab); and second, those pertaining to belief systems (i.e., religious differences, which may also encompass the Hijab) that create obstacles in my attempt to fit into the Canadian secular education system, as they also did during my earlier experiences in the Middle East.

As an adolescent wearing the Hijab in the Middle East, my school experience was not positive—I was home-schooled in grades 11 and 12 due to a policy that prevented female students from observing the Hijab in regular classrooms. Most importantly, during my childhood, my family traveled and lived in many countries throughout the Middle East such as Abu-Dhabi, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. As a result, I was exposed to diverse communities and cultures. Furthermore, by moving from one Middle Eastern country to another, I gained a solid knowledge and understanding of various ethnicities,

religions, and denominations within the same culture, such as Sunni and Shi'i Islamic schools of thought. I acknowledge here that my initial exposure to these diverse experiences continues to motivate me to explore various theories and views in my ongoing academic journey.

In addition, I am the mother of a 10-year-old daughter who initially wore her Hijab from 2010 in a public school before she transferred to a private Islamic institution in 2011. I had been actively involved in her former school, and I thus became aware not only of the incidents and exclusionary actions—such as peer pressure, racist and religious comments, miscommunication with teachers due to cultural differences, and the overall Eurocentric homogeneous environment foregrounding White dominant values—that heightened my daughter's self-conscious outlook as a racialized-minority Muslim. Her diminished self-esteem produced within such an environment contrasts starkly with how she gained a sense of belonging and confidence after moving to her new private Muslim school where she is not a cultural outsider. Consequently, I want to contribute to the creation of safe and welcoming learning environments where other female Muslim students who wear the Hijab in their respective public schools will not feel the same ostracism that my daughter had experienced in her previous school setting.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examined the experiences of young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students with wearing the Hijab in predominantly White Canadian schools and the tensions corresponding to their everyday interactions with the dominant culture and as well as those with members of their own communities. All student participants were between 9 to 12 years of age, as Shi'i females have to observe the Hijab at age 9 (though

some Sunni females do so as well). This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge base regarding the following two overarching areas of inquiry:

1. What are the schooling experiences associated with wearing the Hijab for young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students in predominantly White Canadian school settings where the majority of the students are not Muslim?
2. How do elementary-aged female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students respond to interactions between the dominant culture and their own communities in relation to Islamic principles?

What Is Shi'ism?

Since my research focuses on Shi'i Muslim female students, this section presents some foundational information on Shi'ism for those readers who may be unfamiliar with Islam, a global religion that emphasizes the unity and the oneness of God. The epistemological foundations of Islam are based on a combination of revealed sacred knowledge comprising the Holy Qur'an, historical narratives based on narrations of prophetic knowledge and wisdom (Hadith), and hermeneutic interpretations of these sources, from which Islamic systems of jurisprudence (fiqh) are derived. A large proportion of Islamic epistemology is based on hermeneutic processes (i.e., religious methodology that follows a set of rules and procedures of interpreting sacred texts). Islamic law (Shariah) is based on scholarly legal interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. The exegesis of the Qur'an is a commentary based on an interpretation of the sacred text.

Muslims are usually categorized in one of three religious schools of thought: Sunnis, Shi'is, and Kharijites (Nasr, 2001, 2002a, 2002b). Most Western discussions of

Islamic matters tend to focus on Sunnism (Nasr, 2007). This may be expected, as the majority of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are Sunnis, with Shi'is representing a population of 130 million to 195 million people (Nasr, 2007). Shi'is (meaning followers or partisans of Ali) are in turn categorized into Twelve-Imam Shi'is (or Ithna 'Ashariyyah, the largest sect of Shi'i Islam), Ismailis, and Zaydis. Because this research specifically involved Twelve-Imam Shi'is, the discussion that follows will focus on this latter group.

Twelve-Imam Shi'ism is an Islamic school of thought that refers to two sources: the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith; the former is the Muslims' holy book and the latter is a record of the Muslim prophet Muhammad's and the Twelve Imams' acts and speeches. While Sunnis rely on the Hadith from the records of scholars in the fourth generation after Muhammad, Shi'is follow his son-in-law, Imam Ali, and his direct descendants—the Twelve Imams (Jafri, 1987; Nasr & Leaman, 2001; Tabatabai, 1992). Imam Ali and his people of the household "ahl-al-Bayt" were considered the charismatic leaders by Shi'is who resisted the dominant institutional powers established by other successions who ruled the Islamic nations. Descendants of Ali were then martyred and deprived of their rights as legitimate rulers. "Ashura" is the annual commemoration of the martyrdom of Iman Hussain (the grandson of the prophet) that took place in the year 61 of the Islamic calendar in Karbala, a city in Iraq. (For a more in-depth account, see Aghaie, 2004, 2005; Deeb, 2006; Nasr, 2002a.)

The Shi'is consider Hussain's revolution a sacred and holy one because of its adherence to humanity and because of Hussain's own selfless character and holy status; his is a story of injustice that describes "man's inhumanity to man" (Motahhari, 1985).

Shari‘atī’ (2011a) explains how the oppressive rulers of this time period (referred to as Umayyad) sought to commit inhumane and criminal acts against their people:

Once again create the unknown, mysterious deaths, exiles, putting people in chains, the worshipping of pleasure, discriminations, the gathering of wealth, the selling of human values, faith, honour, creating new religious foolishnesses, racism, new aristocracy, new ignorance and a new polytheism. (para. 86)

It is also important to consider the Majlis, a place where Shi’is celebrate the rituals of their Shi’ite culture (For a more in-depth account, see Takim, 2009). In this place, the attendants celebrate the birth or martyrdom of Ali’s descendants—especially in the evening of the tenth day of a holy Islamic month (Muharram)—and also contemplate the descendants of Ali, who are considered to be role models from whom they can learn lessons related to life and honour.

Role of Women in Shi’ism

Women also occupy a significant space in the Shi’i sacred stories. For instance, Sayeda Zainab, the daughter of Imam Ali, is venerated for her strength and patience.² She was active both politically and socially. After the death (i.e., martyrdom) of her brother Imam Hussein in the battle of Karbala (commemorated by Shi’is as the Day of Ashura), Zainab took care of the children in the long journey from Karbala to Kufa, in

² Sayeda Zainab went through many hardships, such as the loss of her mother at an early age, and then that of her father, and her brother Hasan, who was poisoned. The most tragic was the loss of her brother Imam Hussein in the land of Karbala and her attempt to protect those who survived the battle from the opposing corrupted government of Ibn Yazid.

Iraq, and then to Damascus, Syria. She delivered many eloquent speeches against the opposing government, causing protests against the oppressive Islamic state at that time. Consequently, she was a source of inspiration to many women who were victims of wrongful patriarchal–religious practices (Rizvi, 1985). Thus, Sayeda Zainab’s role became that of the Shi’i community’s leader following Hussein’s martyrdom, due to her loyalty and her closeness to her brother and her own self-sacrifices in order to carry his message. Sayeda Zainab thereby stands as a symbol of women’s power in Islam, women who in turn can become scholars and politicians (Cooke, 2008).

Like many other Shi’i women (Cooke, 2008; Deeb, 2006), I argue that my upbringing with and introduction to Shi’i rituals enhance my understanding of issues related to justice, equal rights, and loyalty. I derived much strength during my arduous graduate-studies program (as a cultural, religious, and racialized outsider) from the Household of the prophet, specifically from Sayeda Zainab. Again, I felt an innate responsibility to conduct research that would give voice to the Shi’i community and believed that my piety (or religious commitment) needed to be clearly articulated as an epistemological understanding that fuels both my desire and ethical responsibility to document and represent the experiences of the Shi’i faith.

Nevertheless, my religious identity as a Shi’i is double-edged sword. During my childhood, my parents recommended that I avoid talking about our Shi’i background, as many of our family members were executed in Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s regime in the early 1990s. Wahhabism, a branch within Sunni Islam and the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia, views the Shi’i as apostates, and high-ranking Wahhabi clerics have in past decades even sanctioned the killing of Shi’is (Nasr, 2007; Takim, 2009); in

many Persian Gulf countries, members of the Shi'i Muslim community face systematic political, social, cultural, as well as religious discrimination (Nasr, 2007). In a recent trip to Saudi Arabia, I experienced a great tension associated with religious discrimination as a Shi'i woman. For instance, I was amongst a group of Shi'i Muslim Canadian visitors who were physically threatened by a Saudi Arabian police officer at a historical religious place in Medina for holding some Shi'i prayer books. My group also faced gender discrimination elsewhere, as we were not allowed to visit certain shrines that prohibited female visitors.

Nonetheless, I had the opportunity to speak with some Shi'i women in Bahrain who shared with me the challenges they faced due to the country's Sunni-controlled government—despite the fact that Shi'is represent more than 70% of Bahrain's Muslim population. Such negative experiences attributed to the Shi'i–Sunni conflict may in turn contribute negatively to my academic endeavors, as the majority of Muslim scholars are Sunni. In short, I negotiate a marginal space in academia in relation to both Western and/or Sunni scholars. The nuances of these marginalities correspond to Takim's (2009) argument that Shi'is in North America experience tension based on their interactions with the Western dominant group as well as the majority of Muslim society, such as the Wahhabi. Therefore, as a self-described Shi'i educator, I feel compelled to document the experiences of this minoritized group as part of my commitment both to my community and to my religious identity.

Shi'i Feminist Scholarship

During my doctoral program's course work, I developed a new understanding of Muslim women's identity. I initially understood that Muslim women occupy a variety of sectarian spaces within the broad parameters of Islamic traditions, and they are not a homogeneous group; for instance, their experiences in wearing the Hijab may not be the same. They may share Islam, but they come from a wide variety of socioeconomic groups and racial and ethnic backgrounds. I realized that being a Muslim is not associated with particular religious features (e.g., wearing the Hijab) and I have come to understand Muslim feminists' interpretations of the meaning of the Hijab as individual cases. Consequently, it is important to consider Muslim women individually and to not assume that all practicing Muslim women are marginalized to the same degree, especially with the diversity of Muslim women in terms of religious affiliation, race, and ethnicity. In addition, Gayatri Spivak (1999, 2010) elaborates on the term "subaltern" as being otherized from the hegemonic exploiting power of the colonizer and society's patriarchy. Both the colonizer and the patriarchal system contribute to making women subaltern, and "If in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, 1999, as cited in Mahfoodh, 2008, p. 66). As Mahfoodh (2008) argues, the Shi'i Muslim females' voice needs to be added to the feminists' agenda: "If the subaltern is created by marginalizing, muting and subordinating another human being, are not feminists as guilty as patriarchy and colonialism in hushing the veiled women's voice?" (p. 67).

Furthermore, I also realized that conflict exists between Muslim secular and Muslim faith-based feminists (Zine, 2006). Muslim faith-based feminists are Muslim

monotheists who believe in the truth of the Qur'an's message and of Muhammad's teaching, and who generally reject Western forms of women's liberation, viewing the latter as being incompatible with Islam. Here, I began to think of my position and whether I can be labeled as a Muslim faith-based feminist, although I am aware that being a Shi'i will make me different from the latter group in terms of interpreting the Qur'an and religious practices. Every Shi'i follows a marja (the most senior clergy, and the main source of emulation for Shi'is) of his/her choosing and most Shi'is turn to the marja when addressing their religious concerns (Nasr, 2007). As a result of this religious hierarchy, it is not acceptable by Shi'is for merely anyone to interpret the Qur'an, due to Shi'is' belief that the latter has two meanings—surface and deep—which can only be interpreted by knowledgeable scholars. Conversely, Sunni Muslims do not adhere to the concept of a marja. Therefore, the majority of Muslim feminists (even the faith-based ones) are Sunni Muslims who do not heed to a marja and thus find it acceptable to interpret the Qur'anic verses related to sharia law with respect to women's rights based on their personal knowledge and reasoning.

In this respect, I view myself as being different than Muslim faith-based feminists and suggest that my Shi'i identity is an important factor in determining my understanding of educational and religious topics. I may count myself as an active agent from a twofold perspective: (a) my research focuses on gender and its relation to race, ethnicity, and most importantly religion, and I consider these issues as crucial for social life; and (b) my research calls for progressive social change in its attempt to give voice to young females who are excluded from Muslim-related research in a Canadian context. Essentially, I want to become a border-crosser without becoming fully indoctrinated by Western

perspectives. Much like Boyce Davies (1994) argues, I will only go part of the way in a given theoretical view. In my case in terms of capitulating to (Western) theoretical approaches I will only go part of the way precisely because they both minimize and oppress my religious self and social cultural understanding. For example, to capitulate to Western secular approaches to research means submitting to and oppressively changing my cultural, religious, and academic multiple identities that are not necessarily borrowed from either Western or Muslim feminisms. For instance, during a discussion about my dissertation research, an academic suggested that some of my participants may not be inclined to wear the Hijab, which I might overlook in order to “find what I wanted to find,” consequently ignore such participants’ concerns. I argue that such comments may reflect an adherence to a highly individualistic culture, as opposed to my approach from a more collectivist cultural viewpoint, and this made me feel vulnerable and limited in my attempt to benefit from the Western education model. In this respect, I was left wondering if the academic who made this comment may have perceived images of Muslim females wearing the Hijab as representations of oppressed individuals who were forced to wear the garment, and if this perspective essentially dismissed or trumped my collectivist stance whereby decisions are made by groups, including those pertaining to religious beliefs associated with wearing the Hijab.

In Arabic, the word “Muslim” is an adjective referring to a person who submits to something. In an Islamic context, a Muslim is a person who submits to God’s commandments, part of which is the Hijab. As for my own understanding, I want to provide a space where the participants can maintain their religious identities by offering them some strategies to help reconcile some of the challenges that come with observing

the Hijab in a monocultural setting. Hearing comments such as those from the person noted above challenged me in terms of thinking on how I might make better use of language that is acceptable by Western educators.

Muslim women's discussion and differences of opinions are no less than those existing among Western women, thus further studies of the actual conditions surrounding the decision to wear the Hijab among Muslim women are needed. Such studies would likely identify the variety of experiences and help to overcome the stereotypes existing in the West. I refer to Western as well as Sunni scholars in this research in order to acknowledge the role of subjectivity and positionality in relation to knowledge production (on one hand) while exploring multiple interpretations stemming from my own religious background and experience with the other. Ultimately, I hope to address various cultural and religious aspects pertaining to Muslim females wearing the Hijab (as discussed in works by Bullis, 1996; Hodge & Nadir, 2008; Irving & Barker, 2004; Nadir & Dziegielewski, 2001; Williams, 2005) in order to understand their needs and expectations in the fields of education.

Rationale for the Study

In the review of literature, I found that most research on Islamic matters tends to focus on Sunni students (e.g., Hamdan, 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008; Nasr, 2007; Shalabi & Taylor, 2011; Zine, 2001) rather than on Shi'i Muslims, who belong to a specific minority group within the Muslim community. I also discovered that the existing research on Shi'i communities in North America (e.g., Takim, 2008, 2009) focused primarily on the Shi'i identity and its relationship to the broader ethnic community without exploring the various social and religious differences corresponding to young Shi'i girls who wear

the Hijab in different social settings (i.e., school, community, home). Wearing the Hijab is a visible indicator of the religious affiliation of a group that often is associated with the so-called war on terror and is represented negatively in the media both locally and internationally (Al-Fartousi & Mogadime, 2012; Shalabi, 2010; Watt, 2011).³ However, studies related to young female Muslims wearing the Hijab in a Canadian context do not consider how a White dominant monocultural school setting may influence the lived experiences of this particular group, which is what my study seeks to investigate.

Previous studies in the area of minoritized populations (e.g., Bosacki, 2005b; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao Yu, 1998; Takim, 2009) have shown how minority youth face different experiences in their social world in relation to White dominant values and belief systems. It is difficult for minority children to negotiate their identity in relation to the hegemony of the dominant group, particularly when the setting is very homogeneous in its Whiteness, as the majority often develop and/or hold negative assumptions of the minority group's values and lifestyles (Bosacki, 2005a, 2005b; Jiwani, 2006; Leer, 2010; Reitz, 2005). Therefore there is a need to examine how minoritized Shi'i Muslim girls construct and negotiate their identities between the homogeneous White dominant group (in this case represented by White students, teachers, and school administrators) and their own social world comprising the Shi'i Muslim community.

Additionally, although previous research on Muslims tends to agree that Muslims are not a homogeneous group and need to be considered within diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic parameters, ironically the religious aspect of the second generation of

³ War on terror is used in the current study to refer to the negative connotations associated with Muslim women who wear the Hijab.

Muslims in North America is more predominant than any other recognition of diverse, ethnic, and racial considerations (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008; Moghissi, Rahnema, & Goodman, 2009; Takim, 2009). The participants of this study come from religious families who follow the Islamic interpretations that recommend the Hijab as a religious practice at an early age. Islam has strongly emphasized the concept of decency and modesty in the interaction between members of the “opposite” sex. Both Shi’i and Sunni scholars confirm that the Hijab is a dress code by which a woman’s entire body should be covered, with the exception of the face and the hands (Deeb, 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008). However, as a Shi’i Muslim, it is important to shed light on the historical divide between Sunnis and Shi’is and demonstrate how this divide is related to Muslims’ different interpretations of a suitable age to begin wearing the Hijab (Dakake, 2008; Deeb, 2006; Takim, 2006).

In order to readdress the dearth of information about Shi’is’ experiences in schools, this study provides an in-depth case study analysis—using interviews, focus groups, and field work—of the schooling experiences of 10 elementary school-aged female Shi’i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students who wear Hijabs or headscarves, and their experiences negotiating religious identity in predominantly White Canadian elementary school contexts.

Statement of Significance

This study contributes to the literature that examines the Shi’i identity in North America (Takim, 2009). The study seeks to explore how elementary-aged female Shi’i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students negotiate their religious, ethnic, and racial identities in different settings, mainly the school and the community, while observing the effects of

internal and external diversity within the same minority Muslim groups (e.g. Lebanese Shi'i, Iraqi Shi'i) and the dominant group. This study includes a discussion of the insider/outsider dynamics of conducting research on religious minorities. For example, it addresses both the important role of the researcher as an insider (i.e., a community member who shares the same faith as the subjects under investigation) on the one hand, as well as the multiple discourses used to negotiate the critical role of the researcher as an outsider (i.e., a graduate student) on the other. The tensions and possibilities that these insider/outsider positions produce are critically examined. The study is significant because it sheds light on Shi'i religious identities in predominantly White Canadian schools and responds to the cross-psychology studies (Bosacki, 2005b; Hart, 2005) that call for future research in the religious identity of children from different cultural backgrounds in order to understand their diverse experiences and identity negotiation. Ultimately, the experiences documented in this research and the recommendations suggested by the participants may help educators to better accommodate Muslim females in monocultural settings.

Islamic Terminology

The following section presents definitions of key terms used throughout the study.

Shi'i

Shi'is comprise a minority Muslim group that believes in Allah, God, the prophet Mohammed, and the twelve Imams. The first Imam is the prophet's son-in-law, Imam Ali, and the rest are descendants of Imam Ali. All Imams were oppressed by the Islamic government and martyred. They have shrines in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Shi'is believe that the last Imam, Imam Mahdi, is still alive and is counted as the messiah of the

Shi'is who will fill the earth with justice and peace just as it had been filled with injustice and chaos (Dakake, 2008).

Majlis

Majlis is a term that touches upon the gathering of Shi'is where ritualistic commemoration of their holy figures takes place. This term stands for spirituality, education, and social communications. In Majlis, Shi'is commemorate the birth or martyrdom of an Imam or the Prophet, or a sacred woman such as Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, and Zainab, her daughter. The Majlis gatherings abide by social etiquette that focuses on respecting and listening attentively to the Religious leader.

Takleef

The age of takleef is related to the transition from the innocence of childhood to the responsibility of adulthood. The age of girl's takleef differs based on the Islamic school of thought and the Islamic scholars followed. For Shi'is, the majority of Shi'i scholars agree that the age of takleef for girls is 9, which makes each Shi'i girl responsible for adhering to all the Islamic practices (e.g., the Hijab, prayers, fasting, and other duties). Girls observe the Hijab at age 9 in front of males except the Mahrams. Mahrams are any of the girls' immediate preceding and descending male family members, including grandfathers, fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, nephews, and fathers-in-law.

Hasanat

In Islamic terminology, this term means the rewards bestowed by Allah that are attained when performing benevolent deeds and worshipping Allah according to the Holy Qur'an and Hadith.

Mou'min

This word refers to a believer but it is commonly used to describe pious believers who adhere to the principles of the Holy Qur'an. Allah promises the Mou'mins eternal happiness in Paradise. The term Mou'min is not synonymous with the term Muslim; while the term Muslim is associated with declaring the belief in Allah Almighty and his Messenger (Peace be upon him), the term Mou'min is associated with following religious practices accurately and correctly.

Organization of the Remainder of Document

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature related to Shi'i Muslim doctrine and identity and Muslim students' school experiences. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and procedures that govern the study with reference to the researcher's roles as insider and outsider, case study methodology, semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings, and qualitative data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 describes 10 emerging themes related to home and community. Themes corresponding to the values of home and community include: (a) martyrdom and self-sacrifice as a means for social justice; (b) transformational meaning of the Hijab; (c) intersectionality between culture, religion, and gender; and (d) effects of visits "back home" on participants' religious identities. Other themes related to the participants' social world of schools comprise: (a) "us versus them" mentality; (b) religious and complex secular dialogues; (c) absence of Muslim representations in monocultural schools; (d) discrimination; (e) remaining silent versus speaking out; and finally (f) participants' recommendations for preserving their identities. Chapter 5 provides a summary and conclusions. The findings are discussed in the context

of contemporary literature, followed by implications to both theory and practice and for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of related literature to Muslim females' identity negotiation, fostering a progression from general to specific conceptual development. The themes that emerged from this literature review address identity theories with a focus on religious identity (Bosacki, 2005a,2005b; Eriksen, 2010; Mascia-Lees & Johnson Black, 2000; Rummens, 2003; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003) and negative stereotypes associated with Muslims (Bosacki, 2005a,2005b; Eriksen, 2010; Takim, 2009; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003); feminism and the Hijab discourses (Bullock, 2002; Cooke, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989; Haddad et al., 2006; Hamdan, 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008; Zine, 2008a, 2008b); Muslim research in schools including case studies, auto-ethnography, and ethnography (Abo-Zena, Sahli, & Tobias-Nahi, 2009; Akseer, 2011; Hoodfar, 2003; Khan, 2009; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 1994, 1999; Shalabi & Taylor, 2011; Watt, 2011; Zine, 2001); and critical race theory (hooks, 2000a, 2000b; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). Figure 1 presents a graphical summary of the literature review where I have provided citations for key studies.

Identity Theories

Defining identity is a complex endeavour because of the term's dynamic and multidimensional meanings (Banks, 1996; Eriksen, 2010). However, a range of recent ethnographical, sociocultural, and cross-psychology studies agree that the term needs to be examined based on various social contexts and cultural variations that may differ amongst groups of individuals (Eriksen, 2010; Phelan et al., 1998; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). In other words, identity is perceived in a particular way both by society and by the individuals within that particular society.

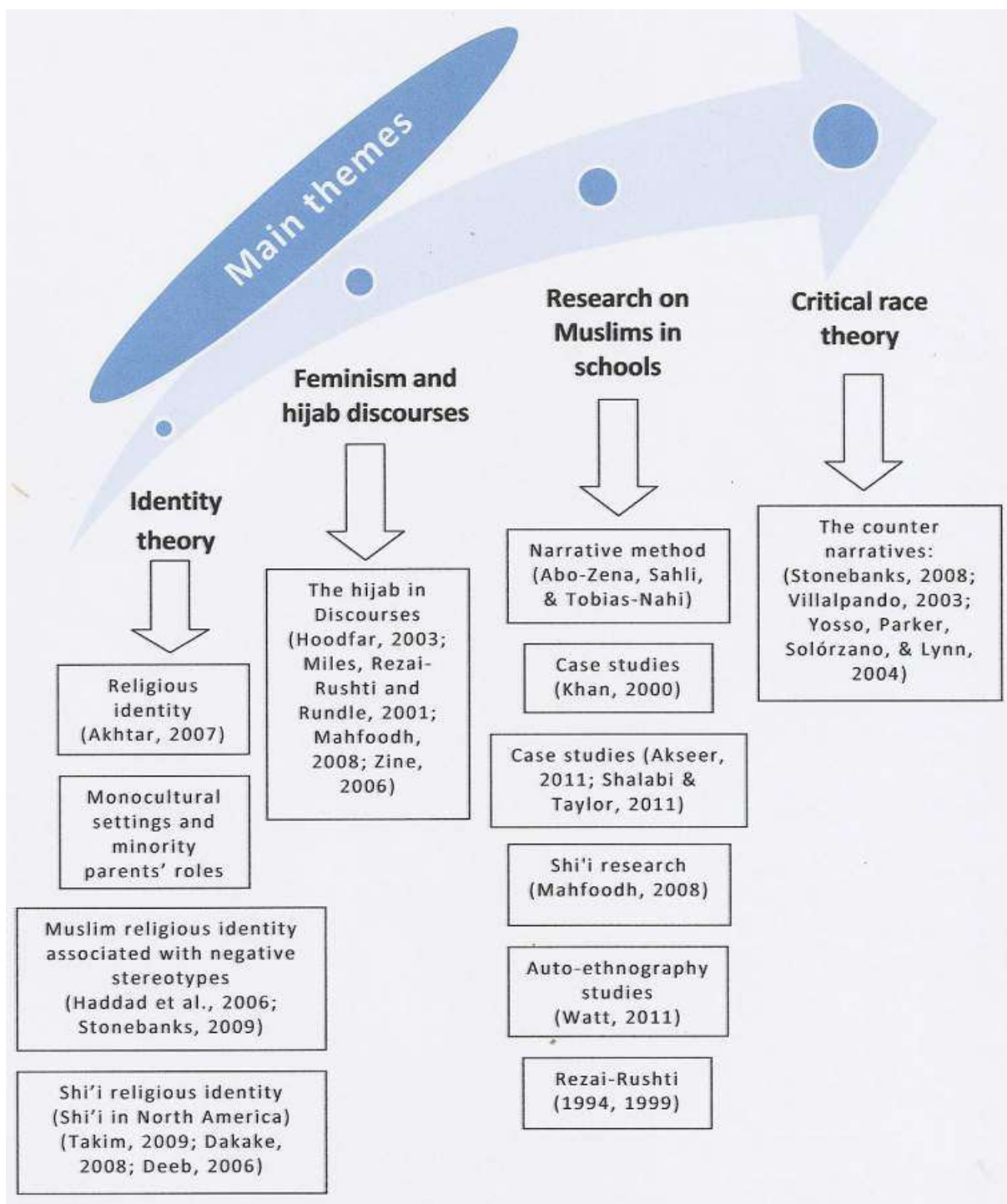


Figure 1. Summary of literature review.

Additionally, children develop an understanding of themselves and their world through their interactions in and with multiple settings, including family, media, schools, and community (Chung, 2011). During their early years, children internalize what is valued and devalued by their cultural group, and develop a multifaceted self-concept that reflects and intersects with different social environments. Correlating identity with lived experiences, Diller and Moule (2005) provide a summary definition of identity as “the stable inner sense of who a person is, which is formed by the successful integration of various experiences of the self into a coherent self-image” (p. 120). Phelan et al.’s (1998) *Students’ Multiple Worlds* study adopted an anthropological approach to education in a 3-year investigation involving 55 students in California in order to examine the factors that influence students’ engagement in schools and learning. Data collection for the study included semi-structured interviews, student-record data (i.e., teachers’ comments, attendance, tests, and grades), as well as demographic information about the students and their families. Within this model, each student’s “world” corresponds to “the cultural knowledge and behaviour found within the boundaries of students’ families, peer groups, and schools” and includes “values, and beliefs, expectations, actions and emotional responses related to insiders” (p. 7). Most importantly, Phelan et al.’s model touches upon the differences in the sociocultural make-up of the students’ worlds—which includes linguistic, socioeconomic, psychosocial, and gender components—that can act as boundaries or borders that impede students’ connection with schools. Such borders are created when particular cultural differences are viewed as inferior rather than as assets by the majority of the dominant group.

In this respect, gaining an awareness of personal and social identity contributes to what Eriksen (2010) refers to as the development of an ethnic identity comprising three areas of identity construction: (a) affect, which corresponds to the sense of belonging to a certain group; (b) cognition, which encompasses the history and knowledge of the group; and (c) behaviour, which correlates to group involvement and celebrations. Ethnicity thus is viewed as an integral part of the relationship between persons who are distinct from members of other groups in terms of cultural uniqueness (Eriksen, 2010). Ethnic identity is also related to the shared characteristics—such as language, religion, and political and economic conditions—that may lead to conflicting cultural demands within the same group. Kincheloe (2008) stresses the need to be aware of such dynamics amongst minority students in order to better protect them from both the overt and covert forms of racism and religious and gender discrimination in their schools. In short, identity negotiation occurs on the level of group inclusion or differentiation, and minority students learn to live within the context of their own culture and the dominant culture(s) of the school (Chung, 2011; Phelan et al., 1998). Accordingly, it is important to be aware that minority students' own culture is not homogeneous, as multiple factors may influence students' interaction with and sense of belonging to their cultural group, including the intersectionality of religious or political affiliation, gender, and social class (Bosacki, 2005b; Eriksen, 2010; Stonebanks, 2008).

Religious Identity

People express their faith through behaviour, belief, and experience (Bosacki, 2005b). Religiosity may influence children's behaviour internally and externally through their adherence to and understanding of religious values. During the development of self-

identity, religious beliefs are internalized and can be seen through internal religiousness (e.g., spiritual experiences, beliefs, and prayer) or external religiousness, such as the involvement with a social network and a commitment to the moral values and norms of a religious group (Krause, Ellison, Shaw, Marcum, & Boardman, 2001). Some critics suggest a two-dimensional definition of religiosity encompassing both private (e.g., individual practices such as prayer and personal commitment to religious principles) and public (e.g., religious-group and ritual participation) forms of religiosity (Litchfield, Thomas, & Li, 1997). Internal and external religiosity may be interrelated, and both may help develop children's overall religiosity.

Some studies indicate that individuals' culture of origins influence their religiosity in terms of their religious beliefs and behaviours (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). In Nesbitt's (2001) ethnographic study of 8- to 12 year-old children from different affiliations, the participants' religious experiences and understanding of spirituality corresponded to their cultural characteristics. Nesbitt confirms that there is a need for future research to examine the children's religious spirituality from diverse religio-cultural backgrounds. Vermeer (2011), in turn, examined the impact of parental religiosity on parenting goals and styles of 356 Dutch parents, and concluded that parental involvement in a religious community (and most notably a mother's religiosity) influences both parental style and their children's religiosity. In addition, the religious community strengthens the children's religious practices and beliefs and provides family and youth with religious, social, and spiritual support (Corwyn & Benda, 2000; Trulear, 2000). As such, the current study documents the experiences of Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian girls' understanding of their religious identity and Shi'i-related spirituality in particular. As the literature

suggests, identity does not develop in isolation (Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Zimmerman, Aberele, & Krafchick, 2005; Zimmerman, Zimmerman, & Constant, 2007) and in my experience the children's social worlds (Islamic centres) and family life (their mothers) affect their understanding of (and commitment to) the Hijab, as well as of the household of the prophets' other ritual stories.

Muslim Religious Identity Associated With Negative Stereotypes

Religious identity represents the “mother of all issues” for Muslims (Haddad, 1998, p. 25). Moghissi et al. (2009), in *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond*, touch upon the multiplicity of the Muslim community. They also refer to religious identity (similar to private religiosity) and religious practice (i.e., public religiosity) in their discussion about the differences among Muslims. Moghissi et al. examined the negative images associated with Muslims in terms of clashes between Eastern and Western civilizations and instances of social and political exclusion following the events of September 11, 2001.

According to Huntington (1997), each civilization has its own cultural characterizations that make it unique but that also make it difficult to be integrated with other civilizations. He claims that while civilizations can borrow certain cultural aspects from others, such borrowing (or importing) is limited, and clashes continue to occur due to cultural differences. Huntington identified eight world major civilizations: (a) Western, (b) Latin American, (c) Islamic, (d) Sinic (Chinese), (e) Hindu, (f) Slavic Orthodox, (g) Japanese, and (h) African. He suggests religion is the main reason for the challenges between civilizations and that there is no hope for integration among various civilizations. When Huntington refers to the decline of the West, he reiterates that the

conflict between Islam and the West will never be resolved; this conflict juxtaposes the tension between Christianity and Islam in terms of their respective belief(s) that their faith alone is the correct one. With this proviso in mind, Said (1998) critiques the clashes of civilization in which Islam is viewed as incapable of appreciating other civilizations. Said argues that Huntington perceives other civilizations as separate from each other, thus reinforcing binary perceptions between the West and Islam and the problematic assumptions that these can never be resolved. Said instead calls for a “spirit of cooperation and humanistic exchange” (p. 9) that addresses dangers facing the human race, such as the decline of literacy, the increase of poverty among global population, and the absence of emancipation and enlightenment. Thus, the cultural clashes suggested by Huntington can be offset, if not opposed, by a model of co-existence that is underscored by community, hope, and empathy.

Stonebanks (2009) refers to similar factors that foster negative images of Muslims, such as the role of the stories that depict Muslim women as victims and represent Muslim countries as problematic, such as those stories presented in Satrapi’s (2000) *Persepolis* and Nafisi’s (2003) *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. In this respect, Bosacki (2005b) added that although religion can play a positive role in reinforcing human values, religious affiliation does create some challenges in a multicultural society. Some children, such as Muslims, may be victimized in terms of bullying and peer harassment, and they may experience cultural, racial, and religious stereotyping. A stereotype is another example of how the dominant group views the cultural differences of a minority group. Stereotypes classify people and can provide justification of inequalities on

accessing resources (Eriksen, 2010). Within these boundaries, the stories of others are created, including those corresponding to the so-called victimized veiled Muslim woman.

Studies of Muslim women often focus on veiling and attribute it to problems associated with Islam and the creation of a sense of otherness (Haddad et al., 2006; MacDonald, 2006). Steet (2000) examined the origins of the negative stereotypes associated with Muslim women in the Middle East. She connects the stereotypes of Muslim women to such historical representations as those found in the *National Geographic* magazine (from 1888-1998), which often portrayed veiled Muslim women as being members of an oppressed and sexualized harem. Similar to Stonebanks (2009), Haddad et al. (2006) also relate the origins of the stereotypes of Muslim women to colonial history, pop culture—for example, in movies such as *The Sheikh* (Melford, 1921), *Not Without My Daughter* (Gilbert, 1991), and *Father of the Bride 2* (Shyer, 1995)—and the media; they argue that although Muslim women in North America have diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, the Western homogeneous power structure keeps on relegating Muslim women to their stereotypical roles as oppressed others. Specifically, Haddad et al. correlate the use of the veil as the source of an Us–Them binary and the perpetuation of Western colonial ideology that seeks to liberate Muslim women; as they put it, “This manipulation of gender to reinforce the so-called ‘clash of civilizations’—portraying Islam as oppressive of women and the West as liberated—has placed Muslim women in Western societies in an extremely difficult position” (p. 24).

Further, Haddad et al. (2006) argue that well-known American authors Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Mark Twain’s use of Orientalist images of

Muslim women contributed to the negative stereotypes of Muslim women that continue to the present day. Moreover, Western missionaries in the Middle East misrepresent the gender role of Muslim women as mere housewives who are obedient to their husbands, versus Christian husbands who are good to their wives (Haddad et al., 2006). Such Western missionaries' attempts to convert Muslim women contributed to the negative images of the Muslim women as oppressed and apparently backward. Similarly, Rezai-Rashti (2005) claims that perceptions of gender within Islam have contributed to the idea of otherness: "Gender issues in Muslim cultures are one of the most important elements of signification and categorization of their otherness, since gender issues have become one of the foundations of racialization of Muslims (both men and women) in Western societies"(p. 181). Gendered representations of Muslim women as an oppressed group function as a way to misrepresent Islam and is one of the main ways used by the media to perpetuate such cultural and religious stereotyping (Mahmood, 2005; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008).

Haddad et al. (2006), in *Muslim Women in America: Gender, Islam and Society*, provide a deep analysis of Muslim-American women's identities by examining their various and complex social worlds, including those within the boundaries of their personal communities. In the latter social worlds, Muslim women act as active agents; they embrace their faith and work as active social agents to affirm their religious identities. Within the social world of non-Muslim environments, they strive towards education and occupy various professions. To Haddad et al., Muslim women have responded actively to the challenges and the discrimination faced in their social worlds through active involvement in the community and through their roles as mothers and

educators who reinforce the moral values of Islam in their respective families, and through their active roles as journalist, doctors, lawyers, professors, and authors in the social world of the dominant group, whereby they may challenge the negative stereotypes that may otherwise depict them as others. In other words, American and Canadian Muslims alike seek to reveal the truer identities of Muslims by reconstructing them through various complex social contexts that includes employment, school, and interactions with teachers, peers, and the broader community (Haddad et al., 2006; Watt, 2011).

Shi'i Religious Identity in Global and North American Contexts

As mentioned earlier, Muslim identities within cultural and social spaces are dynamic and involve a continual negotiation between children and schools (Nasir, 2004, p. 155). Religious identity is thus interwoven within different contexts and experiences. For instance, some Muslims may be easily identified as Muslims because of their names, attire, and nationality though they may not be associated strongly with religious practices. Some Muslims may prefer to keep their identity invisible for fear of being isolated. Although Muslims may have some common religious identifications (e.g., wearing headscarves, praying five times each day), they still represent a varied racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Sirin & Balsano, 2007). Because the present study focuses on Shi'i Muslim identity, the following section examines recent research on the latter topic undertaken both by non-Muslim Western scholars (e.g., Dakake, 2008; Deeb, 2006) as well as Muslim scholars (Aghaie, 2004, 2005; Nasr, 2007; Takim, 2006, 2009).

Shi'is' Association to the Household of the Prophet and Their Community

The Western scholar Dakake (2008), in *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam*, examined the concept of charisma and its social and intellectual influences on the Shi'is both as individuals and as a community. First, she provided a deep critical historical analysis of the development of Shi'ism in the late 2nd and early 3rd Islamic century, mainly after the death of the prophet. She accorded this charismatic authority of the prophet's family to religious rather than political reasons, and she traced their rights of being the leaders of the Muslim community to the historical event corresponding to the famous Khadir Khumm speech in which the prophet announced Ali and his descendants as the legal leaders for Muslims. Dakake argues that charisma is not just related to the legal authority of the Imams but extends to include the collective loyalty of the early Shi'i members of the community itself. In other words, Dakake suggests that the early Shi'i community comprises the charismatic community that "has been granted certain spiritual distinctions and powers that set it hierarchically above the rest of Muslim community" (p. 7).

Dakake (2008) also discusses the concept of Walayat, which is associated with salvation whereby the believers gain privileged relationship with the divine that ultimately prepares them for the hereafter they believe in. In this respect, Walayat is related to spiritual charisma in which there is a spiritual connection between the 12 Imams and their followers (Dakake, 2006, 2008). To Shi'is, "the person who was to succeed the prophet ... received the inner spiritual power of the prophet [Walayat]" and "had to be chosen by God and the prophet" (Nasr, 2000a, pp. 12-13). Shi'is believe that the prophet's inheritors who survived the slaughter constituted a direct lineage from the

prophet and know the inward knowledge of the Qur'an; consequently, Shi'i jurisprudence (fiqh) is derived directly from the prophet and ahl-al-Bayt (Geaves, 2005). Walayat in its most simplified version is basically a status of special friendship with God; people who attain this status are called Walis (for Shi'i Muslims the 12 Imams are the only divine Walis or Holy friends of God). Through expressing loyalty and spiritual connection to Prophet Mohammad and these Walis, Shi'i Muslims hope to gain their intercession with God (Nasr, 2000a). In reality, people of faith, regardless of what religion they follow, often subconsciously adhere to a Walayat of one kind or another when they make statements such as "you are in my prayers" or "pray for me." For Shi'is, they strive to get their Imam's to be that person who prays for them or mentions them to God. Other Muslims also believe in aspects of this intercession but not to the extent that Shi'i Muslims do. Thus, Shi'i Islam develops its own school of thought that differs from Sunni Islam in terms of its law, theology, philosophy, and even methods of Qur'anic exegesis (i.e., interpretation of the Qur'an).

Shi'is' understanding of their individual and community's charisma has provided them with a set of social and intellectual rules that are observed in their relationships within their community as well as in the larger Islamic society (such as the Sunni community). For instance, due to the Sunni persecution of Shi'is and their Imams, Shi'is developed a method of secrecy in which they did not show their loyalty to the household of the prophets in public; instead, they held their own secret meetings to learn the religious rules from the Imams and their followers. Such secrecy pushes the Shi'i community to be more attached to its own members and to strengthen their relationship with each other (Dakake, 2006). In other words, Shi'is' social world was created with

particular social and intellectual boundaries (encompassing marriage, learning circles, trade, and financial matters). However, the early Shi'i community interacts normally with the non-Shi'i community as a means of protection (Dakake, 2008). For instance, the Shi'is were encouraged to pray on communal Friday prayer behind a non-Shi'i Imam, and to demonstrate their faith not verbally but "to be engaged in all necessary social and ritual functions with non Shiite" (Dakake, 2008, p. 239).

In sum, Dakake (2008) differentiates between the Sunni and Shi'i understanding of charisma; she cites Dabashi, who argues that Sunnis relate charisma to normal patterns of leadership, while Shi'is associate the term with the leadership of the prophet's family. Shi'is also associate charisma to the practical needs of the Shi'i community derived from social and intellectual rules corresponding to Muslims' religious knowledge, the Shi'i understanding of communal membership, women's roles in the Shi'i movement, and the interaction with the non-Shi'i Muslim community (Dakake, 2006, 2008; Shari'atī, 2011a, 2011b).

Role of Women in Shi'ism

To Shi'is, Sayeda Zainab acts as a role model and as a means to educate women on the appropriate social roles in Islamic society (Aghaie, 2004, 2005; Deeb, 2006; Motahhari, 1985). Her role as spokesperson after the battle of Karbala in the face of opposition inspires many Shi'i Muslim women and encourages them to become active participants in their respective communities. Aghaie (2005) and Deeb (2006) describe in detail how Zainab's model helps educate current and future generations on the importance of contributing to the development of the community. A more recent example can be seen through the advocacy role of an Iraqi Shi'i woman, Amina Haidar Al-Sadr,

whose counter-narratives attempted to provide different understandings of women's identities in the processes of identity construction and negotiation within frameworks that differ from privileged Western secular contexts. Al-Sadr, who is also known as Bint-al-Huda⁴ (meaning "daughter of guidance"), used story writing as a tool to revive Islamic concepts and values (Al-Huda, 1987). She turned these concepts into living personalities with real-life roles and presented various models of defeated young girls who are encouraged to fight back and regain their confidence and strength to start new, respectable lives. She encouraged any young girl who is pressured by social non-Islamic traditions to fight back for her religious and social rights. Bint-al-Huda managed to create awareness among Iraqi Muslim women, to the extent that this awareness became a common feature in society and was embodied in Islamic dress (i.e., the Hijab).

Through the use of counter-narratives and female characters in her stories, Bint-al-Huda reinforces moral values, faith, and religious practices; emphasizes the importance of marriage and family; and sheds light on the disadvantages and risks of exposure to what she views as typically secular values (e.g., individualism, drinking and substance abuse, promiscuity). Bint-al-Huda creates through her counter-narratives an agency that provides different understandings of the construction of Muslim women's identities. Specifically, such agency presented by Bint-al-Huda opposes any secular view that underestimates the role of religion in enhancing Muslim women's progress (i.e., in reinforcing moral values

⁴ Bint-al-Huda supported the revolutionary stance of her brother Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, both in political and religious contexts, during the oppressive Ba'ath regime in Iraq. After a series of house arrests, Bint-al-Huda and Baqir Al-Sadr ultimately were tortured and executed by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1980.

and self-esteem). Bint-al-Huda thus follows Zainab's model of an active leader who inspires many Shi'i women to value their religious role in society (Al-Huda, 1987).

Zainab is a woman who is conceptualized as being both pious and modern. By piety, I refer to the expressions of religious commitment that Deeb (2006) associates with being active in the community. Deeb correlates piety to modernity in the findings of her 2-year ethnographical study which involved interviews with Shi'i Muslim women in Southern Lebanon. Deeb describes Zainab's role and its influence on Shi'i Lebanese women as being "embodied in the increased participation of women in Ashura, commemorative practices, and the model for women's greater public participation in the community more generally" (para. 4). For Deeb, the commemoration of Karbala—and its application for Shi'i Lebanese women's daily lives—represents public activity that is part of the practice of piety, in order to participate in the progress of the community.

De-Ethnicization of Second-Generation Shi'is in North America

As mentioned earlier, due to the persecution and Shi'is' method of secrecy, the Shi'ite social world was embodied within both their own Shi'i community and the broader non-Shi'i Muslim community. However, Takim (2009) in his *Shi'ism in America* refers to various social worlds and to both internal and external diversity in his attempt to describe the Shi'i community in North America. (See Figure 2 for an illustration of the social world of Shi'i Muslims in North America) According to Takim, internal diversity represents the cultural and ethnic differences that exist within the Shi'i community, while external diversity refers to the Shi'i community contrasted with the dominant group. Takim provides a deep historical and genealogical analysis of the

Shi'is in North America and the cultural, linguistic, economic, and religious ritual differences among the Shi'i community. He argues that the ethnic factor is more pronounced within the Shi'i community than with Sunnis, due to the Shi'is' differences in commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and other Shi'i religious celebrations. Although Shi'is from different backgrounds (e.g., Arabic, Persian, South Asian) share their loyalty to the household of the prophets via their celebrations, various cultural and linguistic differences influence the Shi'i religious communities and separate them from each other. Shi'i Islamic centres play an important role in affirming the Shi'i identity; they are the site for celebrations such as the Majlis (religious gatherings), in which the leader of the centre preaches Islamic values (see Aghaie, 2005, 2006 for further details). Takim also discusses the shift of Shi'i Islamic centres to include some recreation services to meet the needs of the community in North America.

Takim (2009) also discusses the Shi'i communities' relationship to the larger Islamic community, adding more complex social and religious layers to the construction of Shi'i identity. Takim notes that the problem of identity confronting the Shi'is in North America is indeed greater than that facing the Sunnis: "Shi'is seek not only to assert their Islamic identity in the West but also to maintain their own distinct Shi'i identity" (p. 82). Shi'is believe they cannot identify themselves with Sunnis, because

even though they live in multiethnic and a largely pluralistic milieu, Shi'is in America often encounter isolation and resistance from elements of the larger Muslim community and the host society. Since they are a minor component of American Islam, they have to negotiate their boundaries against both groups.

They must resist the homogenizing effects of American culture and confront the perpetual charge of heresy of Wahhabis. (Takim, 2009, p. 232)

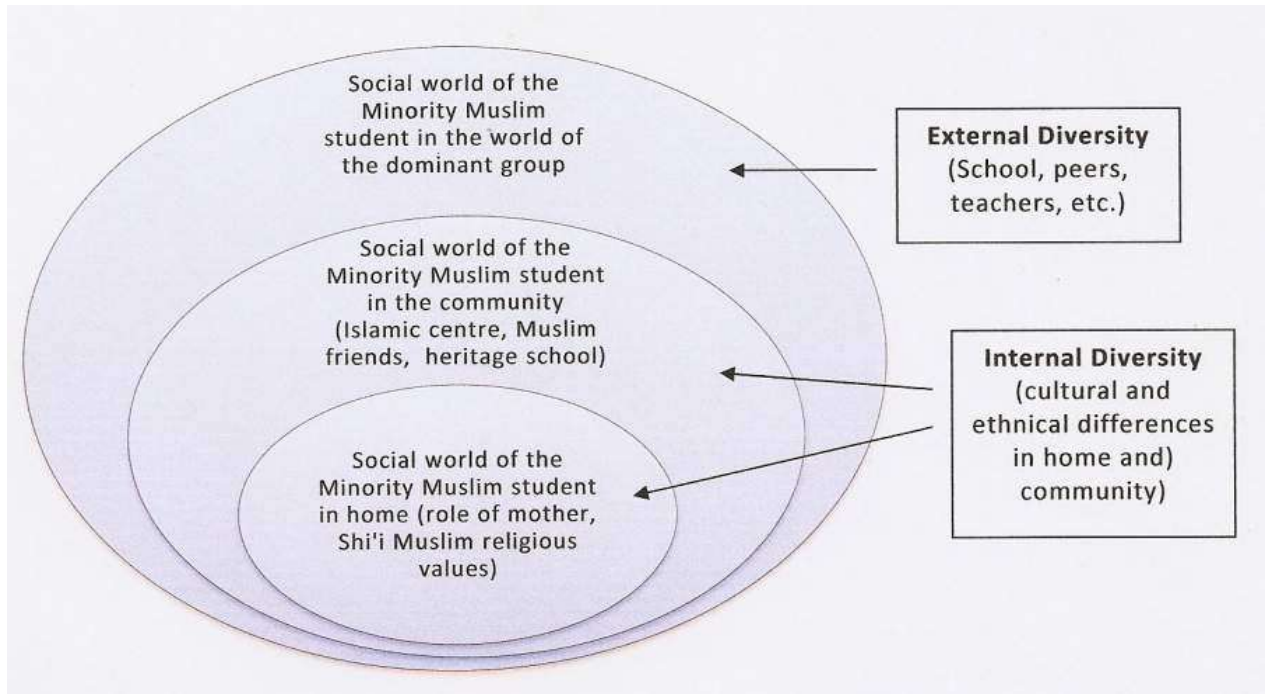


Figure 2. The social world of Shi'i Muslims in North America.

In the distinct Shi'i Muslim community, the focus on the ritual stories of the Imams of the prophets reinforce the boundaries of Shi'i identity and set boundaries that differentiate this group from the majority Sunnis. For instance, Takim (2009) refers to the Wahabbis and their aggressive behaviours towards Shi'is that is not limited to the home countries, but extends also to North America. An incident in the United States in which a group of Wahabbis attacked peaceful Shi'i demonstrators who were commemorating their Imams exemplifies the Shi'is' continuous struggles with non-Shi'i Muslims; other recent examples include the persecution of Shi'i groups in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (Takim, 2009). It is also interesting to observe that Shi'is began to identify themselves as being distinct from the majority Muslim population after the events of September 11, 2011. Shi'is began to call for more interfaith dialogue with Western non-Muslims in order to highlight their religious practices and beliefs (particularly those that distinguished them from the majority Sunni population), and much research emerged (e.g., Aghaie, 2005, 2006; Dakake, 2008; Deeb, 2006) that underscored such a distinction.

Thus, the Shi'is' post-9/11 attempt to differentiate themselves from the "Muslim extremists" created an opportunity for them to acknowledge their religious identities. Deeb's (2006) ethnography study in Southern Lebanon illustrates a Western scholar's attempt to pinpoint how religio-political factors influence the lives of Muslims, specifically Shi'is. Deeb explains the role of Shi'i Muslim women in enhancing modernity through external religious practices, including volunteerism and demonstrating leadership skills through the provision of intellectual religious lectures in the community. Essentially, the role of Shi'i Muslim women has shifted from that of "traditional

housewife” to one that encompasses community service and education, which includes imparting practical approaches in order to implement the moral values of the ritual stories of Ashura in the Muslim women’s daily lives. As discussed earlier, Shi’i Muslim women are empowered by Sayeda Zainab’s exemplary model of women as active agents in their society (Cooke, 2008; Deeb, 2006). To reiterate, Deeb’s study, as well as Haddad et al.’s (2006) analysis of Muslim women’s identities in America, touch upon the discourse that supports the argument that religion enhances modernity⁵ through the active roles that Muslim women occupy in their society.

Shi’i First Generation in North America

Takim (2009) addresses the differences between the first immigrant generation and the first generation of Shi’is. He explains how Shi’i youth are distanced from their parents’ cultural practices and are more aligned with North American culture (e.g., in terms of their clothing). Takim notes that Shi’i youth “reject the ethnic Islam phenomenon” (p. 85) and experience a de-ethnicization process that includes Islamic-centre lectures that are offered in English and Internet sites that allows Shi’i youth from different backgrounds to exchange various opinions on religious topics. Consequently, Shi’i youth with cultural differences are more united than in previous generations; Shi’i identity is the most important aspect to them and this influences their social and intellectual relationships, as well as their views on marriage and on raising their children

⁵ Both Deeb (2006) and Haddad et al. (2006) connect religion to modernity in terms of the active roles Muslim women occupy in their communities. Muslim women do not have passive and traditional roles that adhere to housekeeping but instead participate and volunteer in many social activities within the community and society at large society.

as Shi'i Muslims (Takim, 2009). In the present study, I undertake an in-depth examination of young, first-generation Shi'i girls' experiences associated with wearing the Hijab (headscarf) within their respective homes, communities, and predominantly White public elementary school environments in Ontario, Canada. My research provides specific insights on the relationship between the social world of the minority young Shi'i females and that of the dominant group represented by the girls' schools, teachers, and peers.

In sum, various discourses establish that Muslim women's identities are constructed based on circumstances within their diverse social world, and in Canada, these social worlds also include non-Muslim dominant groups. Mainly, the first-generation Muslims maintain their identities both as North American as well as Muslims regardless of the historical imperial assumptions and the traditional culture of their groups (Haddad, 1998; Haddad et al., 2006; Takim, 2008, 2009). Identity is seen as a site of power operating as a "locus of domination through which people are controlled" (Mascia-Lees & Johnson Black, 2000, p. 83). Most importantly, discourses create categories of identities that sustain relations of power, privilege, and domination in society. For instance, Cooke (2008) argues that Muslim females have religious and gendered identification that "overlays national, ethnic, cultural, historical, and even philosophical diversity" (p. 92). Haddad et al. (2006) interpret Muslim women's adherence to their religious practices as a means to enhance modernity through various leadership activities. Muslim women in North America share equal roles with men in their community and experience high levels of spirituality through their religious practices (including prayer, pilgrimages, and leading public and private religious lectures

in the community). In addition, Muslim women who are mothers also balance their identities as North Americans as well as Muslims; they work hard to educate their children on Islamic themes by using various methods (e.g., play, Islamic cards, technology, three-dimensional puzzles of sacred places) in order to enhance Islamic moral values such as respect, love, and faith, and to guide them away from non-religious values (Haddad et al., 2006).

In short, an integrated conceptual approach is important because identity is located within multiple sites. For example, cultural and religious continuity are important factors for many Muslims, yet this can be an ongoing struggle for them. Muslim females' religious identification is connected to other sites of oppression, such as race and gender, and this consequently implicates the schooling experiences of Muslim students as they struggle to maintain their Islamic identities (Zine, 2001). Further, the schooling experiences of many Muslim female students are complicated by pressures to conform to Western dress codes at the expense of the Hijab (Zine, 2008a). The Hijab is related to gender interaction, which is another challenge for Muslim students as mixing between members of the opposite sex is limited within some Islamic traditions; social distance within much Islamic tradition is gendered and situations of physical contact between males and females violate some interpretations of Islamic moral codes.

Feminist Theory: The Hijab Discourses

The Hijab is one of the most provocative forms of dress and is underpinned by multiple meanings that have been generated by historical, cultural, and political factors (Bullock, 2000, 2002; Zine, 2002). For instance, in October 2009, the Muslim Canadian Congress called upon the federal government to prevent Muslim women from covering

their faces in public (Lewis, 2009). This decision is an example of the sectarian differences that exist within Islamic groups. Further, the Muslim Canadian Congress followed the decision of banning the burka (i.e., the niqab, or face veil) that was made by the head of the Al-Azhar University in Egypt, Sunni Islam's foremost spiritual authority. To this clergyman, wearing such garments was a cultural practice not founded in Islam, and was against the sectarian Salafists, who support wearing burka as part of a Muslim religious practice and thus oppose Al-Azhar's theological teachings (Al-Fartousi & Mogadime, 2012).

Consequently, this debate is interwoven with complicated issues related to controversial sectarian differences; in response, Al-Fartousi and Mogadime (2012) analyzed 40 local and international online newspaper articles to examine this debate with wearing the Hijab. Many of the articles related banning the burka with France's decision to prevent Muslim women from wearing the Hijab in 2004, thus creating the impression that banning the Hijab needs to be considered too. The newspaper articles' images of Muslim women wearing burka were accompanied by women wearing the Hijab, thus suggesting that the Hijab and the burka have similar implications. In terms of gender equality and freedom of choice, most of the articles' anonymous authors offered different interpretations and reported that the burka (often associated with extremism) harmed women by decreasing their chances of getting employment and encouraged a distorted practice of Islam. Some of the negative terms associated with Muslim women included "prisoners behind netting," "deprived of identity," and "degrading" (Agence France-Presse, 2009). In sum, differing opinions within a variety of Muslim sects (i.e., Sunni, Wahabbi) create an urgently contested public debate that effectively brings to light both

the complexity of this issue and the need for further research as a means to identify the implications for young Muslim students.

Muslim women's choice of wearing the Hijab in North America touches upon complex discourses, including adherence to religious practices and the controversy between secular and non-secular Muslim feminists. Bahramitash (2004) provides a clear analysis of the various meanings of the Hijab:

The wearing of a Hijab can assume multiple meanings that are shaped and reshaped through symbolic actions and interactions between people, collectively as well as individually. The veil can symbolize something very personal or it can represent a highly political act, or it can refer to both at the same time, or to neither. Sometimes it is more just a matter of "that's what people wear," something taken for granted without any special personal or political significance. Moreover, the meaning and intentions behind the veil can be very different for the woman who wears it as opposed to those who see her in it. (p. 193)

In addition, some theorists (Doane, 1989; Yegenoglu, 2003) refer to the psychoanalytical feminist perspective when discussing the Hijab in terms of power, transparency, and control—an interpretation in which power is viewed as knowledge without obstacles. Foucault (1977 as cited in Stonebanks, 2004) argued, in the context of prison systems, that power stems from transparency, whereby everything can be seen and thus more easily controlled. Stonebanks refers to the historical context of Algeria and argues that the colonizers prefer to unveil Muslim women as a means of having everything clear and not hidden, thus controlling Muslim society. In this respect, the

Hijab can be viewed as an obstacle to this kind of power, and this way of thinking may justify the decision to ban the Hijab in certain Western countries.

Moreover, for some Muslims, the Hijab may represent a conceptual part of a patriarchal order that can be traced back to Orientalist portrayals of veiled Muslim women who were represented as oppressed, highly sexualized harem girls (Bullock, 2000, 2002; Said, 1979; Zine, 2002). For Muslim women, the Hijab refers to an article of clothing that has multiple sociological and political meanings. For religious Muslim women, the Hijab is an important marker of faith, modesty, identity, and worship (Bullock, 2002; Hoodfar, 2003; Read & Bartkowski, 2000; Zine, 2002). In other words, modesty and chastity (both important ideologies within Islam) are achieved by standards for both the behaviour and the dress of a Muslim. In Islam, the Hijab is viewed as a liberating agent for women, in that the covering brings about respect for women who are recognized as individuals who in turn are admired for their minds and personalities (Deeb 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008).

Zine (2006) categorized Muslim feminists into two groups: faith-based and secular. The former constitute Muslim monotheists who believe in the truth of the Qur'an's message and of Muhammad's teaching and who generally reject Western forms of women's liberation; they view the latter as being incompatible with Islam and call for a return to embracing the Qur'an as the ultimate source for a renewed Islamic social order in which males and females enjoy equal rights. Many of these women find the Hijab to be both a very modest dress and a means to liberate themselves from the Western sexist preoccupation with physical appearance (Denny, 2006). However, not all faith-based feminists consider the Hijab to be a religious requirement (Zine, 2006); according to

secular Muslim feminists, faith-based Muslim feminists frame their identities in accordance with patriarchal doctrine that is organized on racist and classist hierarchies in terms of following the rules and the religious discourses that are male dominated, thus placing Muslim women in inferior positions (Stuckey, 2001). Unfortunately, the lack of solidarity between feminists has contributed to the marginalization of Muslim women's voices in policy-setting agendas (Haddad et al., 2006; Zine, 2006). As a Shi'i Muslim female educator, the diversity related to the Hijab discourses by Muslim feminists create concerns as the voice of those secular Muslim feminists who correlate the Hijab to gender analysis in terms of sexuality, patriarchy, and oppression appear to be more privileged and legitimized in the Western academy than those who relate the Hijab to the intersectionality of religion and other categories (race, ethnicity, class, and gender). This may be due to the history of some Western White feminists who referred merely to the category of gender in their analysis of women's experiences and did not acknowledge the intersectionality (hooks, 2000b; Miles, Rezai-Rushti, & Rundle, 2001; Mohanty, 1991) of race, ethnicity, class, and religion.

Further, Mahfoodh (2008) states explicitly that Muslim women's experiences with wearing the Hijab as part of their beliefs and choice need to be heard and not silenced by the discourses of the secular feminists. For the current research, I focus on the antiracists who are referred to as postcolonial feminists as they examine deeply the multiple meanings of the Hijab in terms of various social, political, and historical contexts (Miles et al., 2001). I also refer to this group as they consider the intersectionality of women which is adhered to the complexity and the diversity of Muslim females' experiences. Most importantly, I critique the different views raised by

some of the feminists with respect to their gender analysis of the meaning of the Hijab. By doing so, I call to open the door for more voices to be heard corresponding to the experiences of Muslim females wearing the Hijab, particularly Shi'i women as the majority of the research on Muslim females in schools focus on Sunni students (Shalabi & Taylor, 2011).

Antiracist Feminists and the Multiple Meanings of the Hijab

Miles et al. (2001) focus on the third wave Canadian feminism that started in the early 1990s and continues on today and how feminists within this phase acknowledge the multiple meanings and the diversity of feminists. In this respect, third wave feminists believe in “knowledge as constructed specific social locations” (p. 3) and thus refuse the essentialized meaning of women that rely on universal claim and ignore the diversity of women’s experiences. They demonstrate their commitment to diversity and call for innovative ways of thinking. Miles et al. refer to three debates related to the diversity of feminists today: antiracist feminists (who examine issues related to women of colour), global feminists (who examine the inequality and the oppression women face nationally and internationally (Bunch, 1987; Tong, 1998), and young feminists (who examine the various kinds of marginality in different disciplines). For the focus of the current research on Muslim Shi'i females, I analyse antiracist feminist arguments as they challenge the essentialized notion of women that focuses on gender as the main category for representing the experiences of all women. For instance, Mohanty (1991), in her attempt to discuss the differences between agendas of many White feminists and feminists of colour, critiques White feminists’ “singular focus on gender as the basis for equal rights” (p. 11). Antiracist feminists instead examine the diversity of women of colour’s

experiences in terms of the intersectionalities of race, gender, ethnicity, and class within the larger society as well as within their own communities (Rezai-Rashti, 2001).

Intersectionality plays an important role in developing Muslim women's identities. Crenshaw (1989) used the term "intersectionality" to explain how race and gender oppression interact in Black women's lives. Crenshaw observed that Black women were discriminated against on two bases: their gender and their race. Crenshaw argued that the issues facing women of colour were not part of privileged White feminists' agenda, as the latter focused primarily on "gender discrimination" and "gender oppression" through their own particular experiences. In *Feminism Is for Everybody*, hooks (2000a) refers to intersectionality as an issue that is typically addressed only by women of colour and describes how intersectionality helps to reveal the multiple factors that structure their experiences of oppression in terms of looking at gender through a prism of racist and patriarchal discrimination that may be overlooked by White feminists:

As women, particularly ... privileged white women, began to acquire class power without divesting of their internalized sexism, divisions between women intensified. When women of color critiqued the racism within the society as a whole and called attention to the ways that racism had shaped and informed feminist theory and practice, many white women simply turned their backs on the vision of sisterhood, closing their minds and hearts. And that was equally true when it came to the issue of classism among women. (pp. 16-17)

Intersectionality also shows the connections among race and gender, and thus it reveals how systems of power interlock by focusing on knowledge and privilege in society (Razack, 1996). A Muslim woman's identity is constructed by her experiences

living in her social worlds. Her identity is perceived in a particular way both by society and by the individuals within that particular society (Phelan et al., 1998; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). In their discussion of Muslim feminists in the West, Zine (2008b) and Cooke (2008) confirm that such individuals have complex layers of identity, which include racialized and religious identities.

Most importantly, antiracist feminists differ on how they articulate and represent the experiences of women of colour and the connection they made to the context and history. In the following section, I analyze Hoodfar's (2003) findings on Canadian Muslim females who wear the Hijab and Rezai-Rashti's (1994, 1999) analysis of Muslim female students' experiences in order to demonstrate the complexity of Muslim females' experiences with wearing the Hijab in Canada, and to assert the need for more voices that touch upon the diversity of Muslim women's experiences.

Hoodfar's and Rezai-Rashti's Analyses of Muslim Females with the Hijab

Muslim feminists differ on the way they interpret the impact of the colonial images on Muslim women. The examples of the differences of analysis can be seen in the work of Hoodfar and Rezai-Rushti. Hoodfar (2003) calls for understanding the Hijab as a "voluntary act with a multiplicity of motives and meanings" (p. 38). In her research, Hoodfar interviewed 12 Canadian Muslim females between the ages of 15-30. She begins by acknowledging the intersectionality of ethnicity and religion on the participants' understanding of the meanings of the Hijab. For instance, her participants were originally from different countries in the Middle East, South Asia, and Somalia, and she provides more analysis to the relationship of ethnicity and religion on their understanding of the religious practices. Specifically, the Canadian Somali participants showed greater

adherence to religious practices than did the Iranian group, whose families developed a negative reaction to the observance of the Hijab due to their stand against the Iranian revolution. (It is important to mention here the influence of political orientation on the experiences of Muslim women. For instance, the experiences of the Iranian group cannot be generalized to all Shi'i Iranian Muslim females, as Hoodfar explicitly states that the Iranians in her research did not follow the religious practices based on their political stands against the Iranian regime.)

In discussing her findings, Hoodfar (2003) elaborates how the participants count on wearing the Hijab as an adaptive strategy that allows Muslim girls to be committed to Islamic mores as well as to resist patriarchal and cultural values. For instance, the participants in Hoodfar's research touch upon the fact that with veiling they gain power and respect from the Muslim community and at the same time assert their identity as Muslims in the larger society. The participants were able to acknowledge their collective values and ignore the social exclusion they faced in the school. Moreover, through the self-taught knowledge of Islamic practices, they responded to the control of male family members in terms of their knowledge of proper religious observances (e.g., women's rights in Islam, such as women's right to choose their husbands and to be educated). Hoodfar also focuses on the impact of colonial images and argues that

it is not the veil or Islam that has prevented the Muslim community from being fully integrated into Canadian society; rather, it is, to significant degree, the colonial image of Muslims and veil, along with the continuous demonizing of Islam, that has proved a major obstacle to such integration. (p. 39)

Hoodfar (2003) examines the experiences of Muslim females in terms of the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and religion. She has her gender analysis geared towards religious discourses and based on the participants' understanding of the role of Muslim woman in Islam and her adherence to her rights as a Muslim woman to have freedom of choice, to be educated, and participate actively in the society. Hoodfar also approaches gender analysis through a critique of patriarchal values and discusses how religion plays an important role in responding to those values within the Muslim community. She also connects her gender analysis of Muslim women's experiences in the larger society by associating them to stereotypes related to the negative colonial images of Muslims and veiling that viewed Muslim women as oppressed, beaten, and hidden in the houses. In sum, Hoodfar's research demonstrated how many of her participants chose to wear the Hijab as part of their religion despite the challenges they faced from the larger society as well as from their mothers (for the Iranian group) who did not associate the Hijab to Islam (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008).

Rezai-Rashti (1994, 1999) reflects on her experiences as a counsellor in the public school system, where she provided workshops on anti-racist education and worked with Muslim minority students. Rezai-Rashti addresses the complex issues related to sexism and race in her analysis to the experiences of Muslim females in the public schools: "these students not only have to deal with the institutional racism present in the school system and in society at large but, sometimes, with sexist practises prevelant within their own communities and the racialization of gender issues at the school level" (1994, p. 78). Rezai-Rashti provides some examples related to the challenges associated with Muslim female students' experiences in the large society as well as their own communities. For

instance, she argues that in many situations, the school misinterpreted the Muslim girls' experiences and associated their problems to a colonial discourse in which such students are viewed as oppressed and victims, thus reducing their problems to stereotypical and racialized gender issues. For example, a particular Muslim female student was referred to Rezai-Rashti as the student failed in her school due to cultural conflicts and her parents' adherence to their "old country's rules." When Rezai-Rashti talked to the girl, she discovered that her problem was the result of sibling rivalry and had nothing to do with the student's cultural background. In another case, Rezai-Rashti explained how some Muslim female students manipulated the idea about cultural inferiority and pitted themselves against their parents, while the school demonstrated an ethnocentric attitude by not having direct communication with the parents.

Ultimately, reading feminists' analysis of Muslim women experiences encouraged me to adapt a gender analysis that counts in the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity, and race as I am similar to some anti-racist feminists (Hoodfar, 2003; Zine, 2008) who acknowledge the complex diversity of Muslim females. I am also aware of the participants' social, religious, and historical backgrounds that correspond to Shi'i spirituality (e.g., the role of female exemplary model and the ritual stories), and thus I incorporated into this study a gender analysis that adheres to an intersectionality that in turn is better aligned both with the participants' spirituality and the racialized gender issues in their schools.

Critical Race Theory

As mentioned earlier, the literature (e.g., Haddad et al., 2006) shows the historical development of negative stereotypes of Muslim women perpetuated by the colonial

hegemonic power structure, and how Muslim women are essentialized as others. I believe there is a need to apply critical race theory in my study as it may best reveal the binary of us/them, and I also employ the indigenous perspective as I view the Muslim community as indigenous with respect to how they are perceived as others (Stonebanks, 2008).

Stonebanks (2008) juxtaposes the indigenous community with the Muslim community with respect to the harm that the two communities experience from the misrepresentation and misconceptions resulted from some research.

Ladson-Billings and Donner (2005) consider how power relationships influence how research is collected and analyzed. The socio-political and cultural position of the researcher and the researched affect how the research is interpreted; the researched is counted as an object whose values are assessed by members of the dominant model of knowing. In this regard, race, exclusion, and terrorism influence the epistemology and the ontology when research is conducted on minority Muslim groups. In other words, the “way of knowing” is distinctly different from “the system of knowing”. With the dominant way of knowing, the focus is on the individual relationship or on the individuals’ past, present, or future, including all the cultural and political experiences. On the other hand the system of knowing is related to what knowledge is valued. According to the latter distinction, critical race theory raises the need for an alternative methodology for research corresponding to marginalized communities (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 2000).

The narrative approach is used to acknowledge the voices of people of colour who have been excluded from the research, though generally speaking, academia’s so-called neutral perspective in conducting research on marginalized groups does not embrace such

an approach in terms of those outsider researchers who misrepresented the narratives of marginalized groups (Smith, 1999). Critical race theory values the research conducted by minority researchers from the same marginalized group because there is a common understanding between the researcher and participants. As Smith (2005) argues, the lived experiences between the two create moments of sharing similar insights, and indigenous research is about changing and improving the situations of the minority groups. Through the narratives, the deep, implicit meanings of the indigenous culture are obtained “to reflect on change that will enhance health in a holistic and culturally acceptable manner. The goal is social justice” (p. 93).

With regards to Western research and the notion of objectivity, Smith (1999) questioned the non-indigenous researchers’ interest and their relationship to Eurocentrism in representing indigenous knowledge. Stonebanks also calls for the development of counter narratives that are going to bring humanity to a people and religion that have been dehumanized, the researcher have to make a paramount step and ask themselves if they account for their spirit and heart, ask themselves if it pays its due respect to the beliefs relating to Islam, ask themselves whether it counts for the contexts of the Muslim experience, and finally ask themselves if it is beneficial to the Ummah. (p. 303)

Takim (2011) refers to the indigenization of American Islam in his attempt to clarify how American Muslims integrate themselves in America in a way that makes their voices heard without sacrificing their own culture:

American Muslims have increasingly expressed themselves through a properly articulated intellectual discourse, so that they can be both physically and

intellectually visible. Muslims have become more assertive and made positive contributions in the political Arena (such as Muslim candidates for school boards, municipal posts, working for the election of Muslim mayors). (p. 6)

Takim refers to the majority Sunni as the main Muslim sect, who are involved in the process of indigenization, while Shi'is cooperate with Sunnis due to their absence in the representation of large Muslim associations.

Stonebanks (2008) refers to Freire's concept of humanization through dialogue in which there is a need to understand the complex political, religious, and social layers related to diverse Muslim communities. Giroux (as cited in Guilherme, 2006) believes that critical pedagogy in society not only addresses the constant need for debate between knowledge and power, but also acts as a means to question social practices and participate in the process of social change. He adds a new understanding of educators' roles as intellectuals when he states, "Critical pedagogy forges critiques and agency through a language of skepticism and possibility" (p. 168). He invites educators to add new vocabulary for linking "hope, social citizenship and education to the demands of substantive democracy" (p. 170).

Paulo Freire is one of the most significant advocates in the literature that examines the development of critical pedagogy (McLaren, 2003). Freire presents some methods for promoting critical consciousness in the minds of students and teachers alike. He focuses on the dialectic between the sociopolitical and the personal; as McLaren points out, "Freirean pedagogy put social and political analysis of everyday life at the centre of the curriculum" (2003, p. 7). In other words, Freire was interested in how the individual consciousness is shaped by the larger world. He elaborates on how critical

consciousness can be developed by questioning the culture in which an individual lives, and then direct their implication in the construction of one's identity.

In sum, Stonebanks counts on the research and its results that can help the community or not. In my research, the Shi'i Muslim girls' knowledge of the ritual stories and historical exemplary models were used as a means of creating dialogues that foster humanity and social justice. The personal narratives of the young girls and my personal narrative connect our past, present, and future and provide us with the opportunities to privilege our knowledge and our community and, most importantly, to respond to the historical and recent discrimination that our Shi'i group have experienced. In other words, using critical race theory, I became an indigenous scholar in my attempt to "relate the narratives of indigenous people and communities that describe the social, cultural and political organizational patterns that reveal ontological and epistemological dilemmas through authentic indigenous perspectives" (Benham, 2007, p. 518); in this respect, the lived experiences of my participants in this research are aligned with what Dunbar (2008) refers to as "sacred acts shared from the heart that relives/recounts their history and culture" (p. 96).

Research on Muslims in Schools

Muslims vary in terms of their religious beliefs and practices and their various ethno-cultural origins contribute to various ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic variations (Abo-Zena et al., 2009). Although Muslims may have some common religious identifications (such as wearing headscarves, praying five times per day), they represent a racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Sirin & Balsano, 2007). Due to the negative images of Muslims, Muslim youth experience stressful situations,

including the fear of being attacked or bullied in schools. Zine (2001) and others (e.g., Beshir, 2004; Kahf, 2006) refer to this psychological factor in their explanations of Muslims' life experiences in which Muslim youth face hostile behaviour in school settings due to discrimination.

Although the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Department of Justice Canada, 2009) promotes the notion that every individual possesses freedom of religion, the day-to-day lives and schooling experiences of Muslim female students call this ideal into question, because their experiences are complicated by the problem of gendered, racial, ethnic and religious beliefs that make them prone to discrimination (Bosacki, 2005b). Muslim students in Canada face many challenges, such as pressures to assimilate, identity dilemmas, school drop-out rates, feelings of alienation, and the predicament of Islamophobia (Collet, 2007; Khalema & Wannas-Jones, 2003; Zine, 2001, 2006). Islamophobia is woven into Muslim students' daily lives and targets their religious, ethnic, and gendered identities (Bodemann & Yurdakul, 2006; Kepel, 1997; Skalli, 2004; Zine, 2001). Mogadime, Ramrattan Smith, and Scott (2008) showed how Muslim youths are routinely represented as a threat to national security throughout the Western world; they assert that: "popular press is a vehicle for reproducing assumptions about Muslim youths as potential terrorists" (P. 1). At the same time, little attention has been paid to how religious identity among Muslim females informs their elementary schooling experiences specifically within predominantly White school settings. While Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009) conducted recent studies of Muslim students at the elementary school level, only a few Muslim female students were interviewed and the

school setting was diverse. To date, most research has been conducted on Muslim youth in Canada are at the high school level (Mogadime & Ramrattan Smith, 2007; Zine, 2001).

Zine (2001) used ethnographic methods to examine Sunni Muslim students and their experiences as a religious minority in the public school system in Canada. Her study focuses on those students who strive to maintain an Islamic identity and on how education has become a place for contemporary cultural politics where Muslims use their religious identities to challenge Eurocentrism in school policies, practices, and curriculum. However, Zine did not include Shi'i students from her respective study, and older (i.e., high-school aged) students may be better able to stand up for their rights, compared to elementary students. It also is worth noting that most of the female participants talked about some of the challenges they experienced in elementary school, and how they were silenced in many situations and even excluded from some social activities due to their Hijabs.

Overall, studies of Muslim female students touch upon the negative stereotype of oppressed Muslim women associated with wearing the veil (Cooke, 2001; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Stonebanks, 2004; Zine, 2006) and how such images create a tension and affect the confidence of young Muslim-Canadian female students (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Zine, 2001). As such, it is very important to understand the diverse social world of Muslim students in order to interpret the meaning(s) of the Hijab (Lewis & Mills, 2003) and to understand what is going on outside the school system (Kincheloe, 2008; Rizvi, 2005).

Abo-Zena et al. (2009) used narrative methods to document the experiences of 10 sixth-grade Muslim students who attended Islamic schools in the United States. The

students discussed through their narratives the various kinds of marginalization they had experienced in public schools due to their identities as Muslims, including their immigrant status, race, and gender. The students in this study provide insights on the tensions and the misunderstanding Muslims may face both in and outside their schools, including four female students who shared their initial experiences with wearing the Hijab at school. Some of them expressed that they had chosen to wear the Hijab because of their religious understanding of the garment (as a practical form of modesty). The four females described the confidence, freedom, and courage associated with wearing the Hijab in the face of religious discrimination manifested as weird looks, peer questions, fear, and anger expressed by non-Muslims. The girls felt that such discrimination was largely due to a lack of education about Islam, causing their peer groups to internalize the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as being oppressed and backward. Most poignantly, the girls also expressed the disappointment they felt when their non-Muslim peers refused to befriend them due to their visible differences. However, the study also points out the Muslim students' relief after moving to Islamic schools, where they felt safe and gained a sense of belonging that was missing in the public schools. Abo-Zena et al.'s study calls for more inclusive education represented by multicultural and anti-racist curriculum, and the use of narratives as a means to bridge the gaps across communities or the binary of us/them.

Another study conducted by Khan (2009) reiterated that Muslim youth are active agents in negotiating their identities, which are determined by how various factors such as race, religious beliefs, gender, and socioeconomic status are valued in certain contexts (Schachter, as cited in Khan, 2009). Khan's case-study methodology included eight semi-

structured interviews and 16 semi-structured focus group meetings with 76 Muslim male and female high school students in the United States. Khan explored the challenges the Muslim youth face in non-Muslim public schools, including peer questions, the generalization of all Muslims as a single homogeneous group, and racial jokes. The participants also acknowledged the role of advocate teachers who help create safe environments by helping the Muslim youth to affirm their identities as Muslims; some of the teachers demonstrated care and concern for their Muslim students and even stood up against any religious discrimination expressed by non-Muslim students and even their colleagues. Additionally, the participants indicated that racial jokes were used to create the Muslims own identity boundary, whereby they distanced themselves from the negative stereotypes (e.g., Muslims as terrorists) through the use of humour with their non-Muslim peers with whom they had good relationship. In other words, for Muslim students, “jokes and humor could create counter-images of Muslim Americans that were positive, friendly, and funny” (Khan, 2009, p. 35). Khan also confirmed that many females in her research use the Hijab as a point of reference in discussions to address stereotypes and to educate their teachers and peers about Islam.

Another case study conducted by Akseer (2011) on six first-generation female Afghan-Canadian high school students examined the identity negotiation of Muslim females across the contexts of home, school, and community. Akseer’s study employs feminist research method, critical race theory, and identity development theory. Two of the six participants attended public, Islamic, and catholic schools, respectively, in Southern Ontario. Study findings reiterate issues related to racism and discrimination in the public and Catholic schools and positive experiences in Islamic school. Home and

community enhanced and reaffirmed the participants' identity. This study is similar to other studies (Hoodfar, 2003; Shalabi, 2010) on Muslim females' students that reinforce the experiences of Muslim female students across different contexts. Moreover, although this study did not provide a deep analysis of the Hijab discourses, the participants asserted the Hijab's religious significance and critiqued the stereotypes associated with wearing the Hijab. Akseer's study is the first of its kind in terms of a focus on Afghani Muslim female students' experiences of schooling. It informed the current study's focus on the various contexts of home, community, and school, but also differs in terms of the participants' ages and their articulation of their identity negotiation across home, community, and school. For instance, the participants in Akseer's research speak about their parents' reaction against their development of friendships with their Canadian school peers, and Akseer's study focuses more on the ethnical differences of Afghan tribes. In the current research, the participants were socialized by their parents and focused instead on their Shi'i religious values that then in turn influenced their interaction in their schools.

Despite the country's reputation as a multicultural society, Canada has a range of social and political issues that contribute to negative racial stereotypes of females who wear the Hijab that in turn have direct consequences for students' school experiences. For example, the two Muslim schoolgirls who were expelled for wearing the Hijab in the Quebec, Canada school system signal the problem of racial and religious discrimination with wearing the Hijab (Zine, 2006a, 2006b). It is also important to mention that the reaction against the demonization of the church over education in Quebec may contribute to the hostility against any religious affiliation, mainly the Hijab (McDonough, 2003).

Also, McDonough refers to the role of the Quebec and the Canadian press on the negative stereotypes of Muslim women with Hijab. For instance, McDonough refers to the article entitled “Hidden Women” in *Chatelaine* as an example of how Muslim women who wear the Hijab are represented as oppressed individuals who can not interact with Canadian society.

Such exclusionary social and political discourses contribute to discriminatory stereotypes leveled at young Muslim females in Canadian schools today. Watt’s (2011) auto-ethnographical study, in which she reflected upon her 7-year experiences living in Pakistan, Iran, and Syria during the 1990s, touched upon her positive experiences with Muslims in those countries and how she was aware of the misrepresentation of Muslim women in Western contexts. Using an auto-ethnography methodology, Watt examined her lived experiences that are totally different from the social and political discourses in the media. She explicitly expresses her commitment to share her experiences as a way to respond to the discriminatory stereotypes against Muslim women. She also acknowledges her role as an outsider and how she may not provide enriched analysis as an insider.

In Watt’s (2011) study, seven young Muslim women were interviewed regarding their high school experiences in Ontario. Through interviews and focus group sessions, their understanding of the role of the media in relation to misrepresenting Muslim women was documented. Watt demonstrated that Muslim females’ identity negotiations are varied, and include the creation of Muslim spaces in their schools and wearing the Hijab to assert their Muslim identity. The research also examined the images of Muslim females in the print media, and linked the visual media discourses with the participants’ lived experiences. The responses of the participants (who were from various Muslim

affiliations including Sunni, Shi'i, Bohra, and Alawite) underscore the diversity of Muslim women and the intersectionality of their race, ethnicity, and culture. For instance, when asked to interpret a photographic image of Muslim women and children wearing black clothing, the participants provided different perspectives that touch upon the values of their respective social worlds. The Shi'i participant connected the photo to the commemoration of Ashura and pointed out that a Western viewer, without any knowledge of Ashura, would likely interpret the photo as depicting oppressed Muslim women. However, the latter did not share any reflections about her identity as a Shi'i and instead contextualized her responses as a Muslim within the dominant group. This may be due to the Shi'i preference for hiding their religious beliefs when sharing their ideas with other non-Shi'i Muslims (Dakake, 2006, 2008; Takim, 2009). The Sunni participant noted that she was not able to understand the commemoration of Ashura, as it is not in her religious practice, and indicated that she had to read about subject in Wikipedia in order to understand the context of the photo. Such distinct perspectives highlight the need to understand the larger social, cultural, and historical dimensions among Muslims. In sum, Watt situates her study with media discourses and academic literature as a way of reviewing the past to examine the self, similar to what Pinar (2004) refers to as "subjectivity that one experiences history and society and through which history and society speak" (p. 23).

With respect to Muslim students amongst dominant groups, minority households were considered as insufficient for enhancing their children's social and cognitive development. As mentioned earlier, Muslim students are categorized as a single homogeneous group and their cultural values were perceived as inferior in comparison to

the dominant cultural group's values (Bosacki, 2005b; Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). Similar to the social world model proposed by Phelan et al. (1998), Zine's (2001) study on the experiences of high school students in Ontario indicated that Muslim students reconstructed their identities through three different zones: their religious culture, their ethnic culture, and the mainstream culture. Zine notes that Muslim students negotiate their multiple identities through a complex social world and through their multiple identities they resist the marginality they face in their schools. Razai-Rashti's (2005) case study of 12 females and their experiences in the Canadian schools show that the dominant groups' (i.e., the teachers' and administrators') values overpower the Muslim students' cultural values. This was seen through associating conflicts with the misconceptions towards Islamic values and on the Muslim students' cultural values rather than on their personal traits.

Hoodfar (2003) also documented the experiences of 55 students from various groups. She suggests that Muslim students use the Hijab as a way to respond to their multiple identities between their religious social world and the non-Muslim social world. Hoodfar's study, like other research on Muslims mentioned earlier, draws attention to the oppression brought on by the dominant group's adherence to stereotypes and its lack of knowledge of Muslims' backgrounds. Similarly, Shalabi's (2010) five case studies of Sunni Muslim Canadian households from diverse backgrounds demonstrate the role of the Islamic culture on how Muslim students negotiate their identity in their world and in the dominant world. The study findings, derived from interviews, highlighted the important role of the mother, the role of spirituality through ritual practices, the role of the Muslim community in enhancing Muslim students' knowledge, the moral values

associated with the responsibility within the larger community, and the use of culturally responsive pedagogy as an approach to integrate the school with the Muslim students' households. This research indicates the need for future research that examines the Muslim students' households from other Islamic sects, and the need for future research that examines the experiences of Muslim students at the elementary level, since Shalabi's study indicates that students in elementary levels many not be accommodated to practice their Islamic values as in the high school:

Another research question that emerged from this study is "How do Muslim children in elementary public schools negotiate their multiple identities?"

Collecting data from focus groups that include Muslim children in elementary public schools could reveal information about the dynamics of the daily experiences that these children go through in their schools and how they intersect with their lives in their homes. This type of information could contribute to the literature and provide a better understanding of the multiple identities and complex experiences that these children encounter in an age where a sense of identity might not be completely formulated. (Shalabi & Taylor, 2011, p. 26)

In this respect, the current study addresses Shalabi's call for research that documents the experiences of elementary-aged Shi'i Muslim students. This study provides different experiences related to Muslim households in terms of its focus on Shi'i ritual stories and their impacts on the participants' identity negotiation and development processes in various contexts.

As most research on Muslim students in Canada focus on Sunni students (e.g., Hamdan, 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008; Nasr, 2007; Shalalbi & Taylor, 2011; Zine, 2001), there

is a dearth of research that examines Shi'i Muslims' identities in school settings. Although some research mentions the diversity of Muslims in terms of their religion, culture, and race—and the need to be aware of this diversity to understand Muslim students' experiences—the focus usually is on the boundaries that exist between the Muslims' social world and the world of the non-Muslim dominant group. For instance, in Abo-Zena et al.'s (2009) study discussed earlier, a Shi'i Ismaili student complained about how many non-Muslim students asked him about certain religious practices of Muslims, though he belonged to a different sect that did not observe such practices. Watt (2011) also referred to a Shi'i Muslim student who stressed sectarian differences when asked about specific visual images corresponding to Shi'is in Turkey. It thus is important to examine the religio-political aspects mentioned by Kincheloe (2005) and other researchers (such as Stonebanks, 2004, 2008) in order to better understand the Muslim students' interaction with others in terms of their diverse religious affiliation and cultural backgrounds.

In a North American context, Mahfoodh's (2008) study examined the experiences of Shi'i females in the United States and Bahrain. This research is very important as it examined the Hijab from a Shi'i Muslim perspective. Mahfoodh's research can provide Western readers with a very clear explanation of the various types of the Hijab worn by Muslim women, especially with the illustrations used in her dissertation. The photos of participants provide actual images of young Muslim women wearing the Hijab and facilitate an understanding of ethnic and racial differences among Muslim groups. In an attempt to give voice to female Shi'i Muslims, Mahfoodh interviewed 15 young girls from Bahrain and another 15 young Muslim girls from Dearborn, Michigan, all of who

wear the Hijab. Using two geographical sites provided different political and cultural contexts, and the settings were very diverse. However, the researcher shed light on religious identity in the community rather than in a school setting. Mahfoodh used religious and historical discourses in her analysis and critiqued feminists for their failure to acknowledge women wearing the Hijab. Interviews were the only method used for collecting data. As a Shi'i Muslim researcher, I can recognize the religious language used in this research, and how it privileges Shi'i Islam—for example, by stating that Shi'i scholars acknowledge the role of Muslim women of the descendants of the Muslim's prophet Mohammed more than Sunni. In my research, I incorporate multiple views and incorporate three methods including interviews, focus-group meetings, and my reflective field notes in order to gain insights about the participants' experiences with wearing the Hijab in predominantly White academic institutions.

As a scholar, I believe that new models for understanding the relationship of religion and education must be developed, some that perhaps respond to the underlying direction to keep religion out of Canadian schools (Lupu et al., 2007; McLaren, 2003). Many incidents of anti-Muslim or anti-Arab hate crimes have been reported since the events of 9/11 (Lynch, 2007). A number of Muslims feel that some Westerners act in a prejudicial way toward them due to their religious affiliation, country of origin, or physical appearance (Alvi, Hoodfar, & McDonough, 2003). Normalizing a cultural or religious practice means trying to make it seem like it is a part of everyday life. For instance, girls should not be harassed for wearing headscarves (Watt, 2011).

Monocultural Settings and Minority Parents' Roles

Studies have shown that one of the most significant shapers of minority students' identities and social experiences is the role of their parents as representatives and reinforcing agents of cultural practices (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005; Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). Some Muslim children's daily lives—specifically for those who live in the West—are influenced by their parents' continuous Islamic teaching values (Hoot, Szecsi, & Moosa, 2003), which are expected to be honoured and appreciated by Muslim children (Bemat, 1985; Beshir & Beshir, 2000). However, some studies did not focus on the influence of Islamic culture at home when addressing challenges faced by Muslim students in public schools (Akhtar, 2007; Azmi, 2001; McCreery, Jones, & Holmes, 2007).

Monoculturalism—which Cox (1991) refers to as monolithic (as cited in Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005) and Katz (1988) as resistant (as cited in Chesler et al., 2005)—is characterized by the maintenance of traditional forms of White domination privilege and resistance to multicultural change. The dominant culture both overtly and covertly promotes a perception of normalcy and superiority of the advantaged group. This so-called normalcy is used to define what is good and right and, consequently, becomes institutionalized through policy and practice (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Where the majority of the students are White, little communication occurs across racial/ethnic lines. The focus is largely on token diversity, and the representation of small numbers of people of colour is not recognized in terms of social activities. Assimilation into dominant traditions is typically encouraged, such as acknowledging dominant celebrations over minority ones, having no special funds for diversity groups, and no

external socializing with diverse groups such as parents (Chesler et al., 2005). Thus for monocultural settings, an important concern is on the perception of normalcy and its effects on racialized groups. Also, raising my children in diverse and non-diverse cities opened my eyes to the differences between the diverse and monocultural settings; for instance, children are more aware of their cultural and racial differences in non-diverse rather than diverse settings due to their small population where they feel isolated in terms of their religious and cultural activities (Aboud, 2008).

Some research in educational contexts (Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Landsman, 2001; Leer, 2010; Moller & Allen, 2000) have discussed the following findings: that White students in monocultural settings may perceive others minority values as inferior; many teachers are not interested in examining diverse cultures deeply but instead focus on universal themes; and teachers often do not believe it is important to teach about others cultures in such homogeneous setting. With this proviso in mind, it is easy to anticipate that the monocultural setting provides minority students with experiences that differ from those in diverse settings (Leer, 2010). This study documents the experiences of young female Muslims in monocultural settings where they were the only ones wearing the Hijab.

Zine (2001) demonstrates that Muslim students “are located at the nexus of social difference based on their race, gender, and religious identity” (p. 400). Critical race theory focuses on understanding the relationship between power and race. The result is that Whiteness becomes natural and invisible and can be difficult to identify. Furthermore, with respect to women-of-colour’s identities and intersectionality in education, Yosso and Solórzano (2002) explain that educators cannot group all females’

experiences together. For instance, minority Muslim women may experience religious, ethnic, and racial discrimination. However, critical race scholars also explain that racist speech, thought, and action can be challenged through various narratives (Olmsted, 1998; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). In the present research, the participants shared some of their narratives that touched upon their lived experiences and their responses to discrimination and stereotypes.

Conclusion

Several studies have shown that female Muslim students negotiate their identities through different social worlds. Consequently, they experience various forms of discrimination, assimilation, and other challenges. Muslim students also face some challenges within their own culture, and they adapt defensive strategies to be accepted as American or Canadian as well as Muslims. The use of the Hijab has different discourses due to the diversity of this group and the recent political, religious, and cultural dynamics that influence the meaning of the Hijab. The colonial powers have historically linked the Hijab to negative stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed and sexualized beings and have perpetuated an Us/Them binary. The political and religious dynamics both in and outside of schools influence the construction of Muslims' interaction in their classrooms and create a need for educators to become better educated about others in order to provide supportive environments for the minority students. Due to the diversity of Muslim groups, more research is needed to provide insights into the development of the social identity of certain minority groups, such as female Shi'i Muslim students. Moore (2006) argues that school leaders must be aware of the personal and the religious rights of Muslim students. Educators should accommodate Islamic practices such as

fasting, prayer, and dress through normalization. Also, further research is needed to explore the boundaries of the Muslim social worlds in monocultural settings. Since the majority of research focuses on the high school level, the present study provides much-needed insights on the construction of Shi'i Muslim girls' identities in predominantly White Canadian elementary schools.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter provides an overview of the study's methodology. The chapter presents specific information about the selection of the participants, artifacts, data collection, and analyses. The study uses a qualitative, case-study methodology and follows Phelan et al.'s (1998) social world model to examine the participants' negotiation of their identities within the social boundaries of their different social worlds. The study took place primarily in two private Islamic community centres and involved two phases. The first phase consisted of 10 individual interviews, and the second phase consisted of two focus-group meetings with the participants.

McCutcheon (2005) explains some of the tensions that can be created in conducting research related to a religious group at secular academic institutions. For example, McCutcheon refers to the differences that exist between the "cultural authority of scholars" (p. 300) and the religious identity of the researcher, as well as the critical need for any religion-based researchers to deconstruct their academic voice from their personal voice. Consequently, in the following section, I address my dual research role as both an insider and an outsider in academia, which includes my Shi'i Muslim religious identity and how it influences my understanding of and interaction with theories espoused by women of colour in the academy. Specifically, I draw parallels between how they experience injustice and discrimination, their inclusion of spirituality and reflexivity, and my own experiences. Furthermore, I explore how my awareness of my religious identity and the research-based knowledge centering on women of colour has encouraged me to utilize both my professional and religious backgrounds as a means to document the Shi'i Muslim community within the social and cultural field of education.

As such, I argue that my work makes new inroads into feminist theorizing by drawing conceptual links between these previously unknown connections such as the impact of the historical female exemplary role model and the ritual stories on the experiences of Muslim females wearing the Hijab. In so doing, I walk a delicate balance between my role as insider and outsider. I clearly articulate this understanding as growing out of the nexus between a social justice position documented by and between Shi'i Muslim religious ritual stories and critical reading about the experiences of women of colour in the academy.

Researcher's Roles as Insider and Outsider

As a woman of Shi'i Muslim faith, I associate with collectivist views of knowledge based on religious beliefs and group consensus. At the same time, as a Muslim female scholar, I must turn a critical eye on my religious identity and consider how it has informed the construction of my subjectivity. As a starting point, I incorporate the work of Audre Lorde (1984) in *Sister Outsider*, particularly her theoretical use of the term "erotic." Lorde defines erotic as an assertion of the life force that empowers women to acknowledge their intellectual potential, without worry of being accused as extreme or radical. To Lorde, a woman should be free to "appreciate her inner voice that requires her to do what she ought to do" (p. 56)—which in my case means acknowledging my Shi'i Muslim religious spirituality and engaging in societal critique. In an analysis of interviews with Caribbean women in Canada, Bobb-Smith (2003) refers to spirituality in terms of the Caribbean women's ritual narratives and its relation to subjectivity. In this research, I posit that subjectivity in my own work is manifested as an alignment with my religious beliefs and doctrines that draws from a counter-narrative (i.e., the Shi'i narrative

of Karbala and, more broadly, the marginalized and dissenting ideological position of Shi'ism in relation to global Islam).

The narratives of women of colour in academia allow me to gain a legitimate voice (Bobb-Smith, 2003; hooks, 2000; Mogadime, 2002, 2003, 2005). I interrogate what this means in terms of knowledge production and how I can provide new or alternative inroads into religious expression in and through academic knowledge production. In my role as religious Shi'i insider, I seek to shed light on the limitations and tensions that are inherent in this academic space by drawing upon the religio-historical model of Sayeda Zainab and associating it to the Shi'i concept of justice and humanity with the research and work women of colour in the academy. In so doing, I attempt to reach a balance between my religious self-understanding on the one hand and the research literature on the other by specifically incorporating feminist notions of spirituality as a healing process (hooks, 1993, 2000), resistance (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2007), and reflexivity (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Devault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Smith, 1987). This theorizing between the intersectionalities of my locations is advanced as a means to accomplish the following: (a) illuminate the connections I draw between my insider religious self-identity and that of women of colour, mainly Black women (and their use of spiritual energies in their work); (b) discuss how the writing of women of colour is articulated by them in order to stay whole (in mind, body, and spirit); and (c) discuss how women of colour integrate creative and spiritual energies as a vehicle for rechanneling their marginalized identities toward the production of new knowledge in the academy (Bobb-Smith, 2003; hooks, 1993, 2000).

My "outsider" role (in relation to the community) is manifested in my attempt to

walk yet another (or third) tight rope in the balance between my religious commitment and my academic responsibilities as a researcher. This third tight rope is based on tensions that I must explicitly articulate as follows: On the one hand I must abide by academic criteria (i.e., ethics, and the process of data collection and analysis) in order to document the experiences of marginalized religious minority groups in their various social worlds (i.e., the diverse social worlds within their community and their social world within the dominant group comprising their school, peers, and teachers). On the other hand, I attempt to conduct my research in respectful ways that do not break the trust my participants have in me as a member of their community.

Sayeda Zainab as a Role Model for Muslim Women

For Shi'i Muslim women, Zainab acts as a role model and as a means to educate them about their social roles in Islamic society (Aghaie, 2004, 2005; Deeb, 2006; Motahhari, 1985). Her role as spokesperson after the battle of Karbala in the face of opposition inspires many Shi'i Muslim women and encourages them to become active participants in their respective communities (Aghaie, 2004, 2005; Dakake, 2007; Deeb, 2006).

Like many other Shi'i women, I too am inspired by Sayeda Zainab in terms of her courage, education, piety, and loyalty. I argue that my upbringing with and introduction to Shi'i rituals both support and empower my understanding of issues related to justice, equal rights, and loyalty. I derived much intellectual and spiritual strength during my arduous graduate-studies program from the Household of the prophet, specifically from Sayeda Zainab. I believe that my piety (or religious commitment) needs to be made public through my research especially because this research documents the experiences of female students

of Shi'i Muslim faith.

Nevertheless, my religious identity as a Shi'i Muslim is double-edged sword. As a member of a minoritized and even threatened religious community, and due to the historical persecution and oppression of this group (within the Muslim faith) to the present day, I have experienced the pressure of having to censure my authentic Shi'i religious affiliation. I have experienced the secrecy and dissimulation that has been widely practiced as a strategy of survival and self-perpetuation (*taqiyyah*) by my religious group. During my childhood, I avoided talking about my Shi'i background due to the fact that many members of our family were executed in Iraq during the Saddam Hussein regime. Further, in many Persian Gulf countries (such as Bahrain), members of the Shi'i Muslim community continue to experience systematic political, social, cultural, and religious discrimination (Nasr, 2007).

Hugh Urban (1998) negotiated the effect of such secrecy on researchers' responsibility in terms of determining what is appropriate for the researcher to document, or to disclose. In my case, with the religious secrecy that I was raised with, I was initially hesitant to work on documenting this minority group; however, I felt free enough in Canada to share and document both my own and my participants' religious identities. Moreover, as a self-described Shi'i Muslim educator and as part of my academic role as a researcher in the sociopolitical arena, I felt it was important to critically analyze the data in this study and, more importantly, to give voice to this minoritized group as part of my commitment both to my community and to my religious identity. Consequently, Shi'ism (and its associated worldview) to some extent undergirds my academic as well as my emotional and personal development.

My understanding and quest for justice and equity stems from my learning about others' experiences and challenges in the academy, such as a lack of mentoring, lack of diverse teaching opportunities, and poor advising (Austin, 2002; González, 2006; González et al., 2001; Mogadime, 2003, 2005; Mogadime & Al-Fartousi, in press). I was able to see that my experience resonates with the experiences of many graduate minority students; as I noted elsewhere, "I have noticed that many students find it difficult to communicate with me due to my religious identity and my appearance to them as a Muslim female educator wearing a scarf" (Al-Fartousi, 2009, p. 14). Ultimately, reading about the experiences of women of colour has helped me to both see and value our common experiences of institutional oppression on the one hand and resistance on the other. Resistance includes rechanneling oppression by using creative spiritual energies that open up the production of new academic knowledge within new areas of inquiry.

Within the Canadian academic environment, I experience great tension because my piety and religious beliefs are often discounted or dismissed in the academy. However, these places of tension can be creative spaces to carve out an otherwise oppressed and silenced voice, and to draw from the work of feminists who use the academic milieu as a site for power and new knowledge production (a theme touched upon in Bobb-Smith, 2003; Collins, 1998, 1999, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2007; hooks, 1993; Mogadime, 2002). My subjectivity is embodied in my religious commitment that motivates me to create critical/social research that actively provides me with a critical stance in my academic work (Mogadime & Al-Fartousi, in press). Most importantly, my innate religious commitment obliges me to conduct research that will express the Shi'i community's needs and to clearly articulate them as an epistemological understanding. Such understanding fuels both my

desire and ethical responsibility to further document and presents the experiences of the Shi'i believers.

In this respect, my position is aligned with Carole Boyce Davies's (1994) cross-cultural perspective used to negotiate Black women's identities through their writings. She critiques Western theories that represent concepts that privilege the social relations of dominant groups and underestimate others. Boyce Davies also challenges Lorde's criticism of how Western European theories interpret human differences in terms of binaries and dehumanization. Instead, Boyce Davies refers to critical relationality, which acknowledges various resistant discourses relationally according to historical and political situations, and she uses the term "going a piece of the way" to explain how individuals negotiate identities that are intersected by factors such as geography, race, gender, and economic status. Within the critical-relationality model, differences within the same group, or "the specificity of the other" (p. 35) and "the synchronic, multiply articulated discourses" (p. 41) are interwoven in a web-like manner. With critical relationality, "an intersection may be encountered as a site of conflict, confusion, anger, or be seen as a nexus of engagement, growth of specific identity and creativity" (p. 41). In short, I adopt Boyce Davies's stance in only going a piece of the way with Western theories, and argue that my insider knowledge and epistemological insight allow me to speak from a much needed subaltern perspective. I thus strive through my research to provide a space in secular society (represented by the university) where women of Shi'i Muslim faith can express their views and reconcile some of the challenges that come with preserving their religious and cultural identity (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003). I am also similar to and identify with so-called third-world women (Mohanty, 1991) or women of colour in the academy in my attempt as a researcher to relate

and highlight my Shi'i religious and political backgrounds into my research.

My academic and personal voices must also address the multiple viewpoints of feminism and critical race theories corresponding to race, gender, and marginality. For instance, I need to be aware of differences between religious discourse and a secular viewpoint that is typical in academia. Consequently, I refer to feminist researchers as they draw upon experience and feeling (Hesse-Biber, 2007) and have positioned the researcher as an insider and/or an outsider (Acker, 2000; Smith, 1987). Mainly, the concept of insider has been used to tackle the issue of injustice and inequity with respect to minority groups, such as my religious group. In research, this is evident in the biographies of marginalized and minority women in the academy (Acker, 2000; Lock, 1997; Ortlipp, 2008). Patricia Hill Collins (1999) refers to the "outsider-within" the academy which corresponds to "situational identities that are attached to specific histories of social injustice" (p. 86). I touch upon Collins's concept of outsider-within to address my marginalized religious identity that corresponds to historical stories of injustice and inhumanity in relation to the oppressed Shi'i religious identity and continues to the present (in my identity both as a Shi'i Muslim and a woman of colour). Collins's concept also helps me to clarify that my experience cannot be generalized to all women of Shi'i faith due to the diversity that exists among the same minority group. Similarly, Bobb-Smith (2003) refers to the importance of constructing her subjectivity through her narrative and how her experience is different from the Caribbean women in her research. In sum, I share with these feminists the sense of injustice that underpins and is described throughout their counter-narratives.

I also share with them their use of spirituality in their attempt to resolve issues related to their marginalization and their quest for equity (Bobb-Smith, 2003; hooks, 1993,

2000a, 2000b). By spirituality, I refer here to Chin's (2006) succinct description of "personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose" (p. 2). Similar to O'Sullivan, Morrell, and O'Connor (2002) and Astin (2004), I expand the term spirituality to include human values and the connectedness to others and the world around us, which in my case includes my advocacy role in support of other women of Shi'i faith in the academy. My spirituality is inspired by the religio-historical revolution of Karbala which empowers me with the importance of sacrifice, love, and care for others. I am also empowered by women of colour who refer to spirituality as "divine spirits ... with higher powers" (hooks, 1993, p. 183) and perceive it as a means to heal themselves from any emotional tensions caused by discrimination and other injustices. Other women of colour use spirituality as a means of resistance, which constitutes a form of hope and faith in order to survive (Bobb-Smith, 2003; Lorde, 1984).

In an educational context, I look for transformative change which does not merely empower me to survive but rather moves me towards redefining the relationship between my academic work and the world of my Shi'i Muslim community in order to produce knowledge that counts for the "needs and the interests of people ... and not the needs and interests of ruling" (Smith, L. 1999, p. 16). In this respect, my transformative advocate's role is manifested in my research and embodied in my relationship with what O'Sullivan et al. (2002) refer to simply as "other humans and with the natural world" (p. 11). Therefore, this current research developed a better understanding of schooling experiences associated with young female Shi'i-Muslim Canadian students who wear the Hijab in predominantly White school settings where the majority of the students are not Muslim, and how they responded to interaction with the dominant culture.

Methodology

The empirical research design is based on a case study methodology in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into the topic (Stake, 2005). Willis (2007) associates case studies with their main purpose of representing “real people and real situation[s]” (p. 239), and outlines three primary aspects of case study research: (a) collecting rich and detailed data in authentic settings, (b) being holistic in terms of understanding human behaviour as lived experience in the social context, and (c) avoiding universals by understanding the context researchers are studying. Stake (2005) also describes three types of case study: (a) intrinsic, when the researcher has an interest in the case; (b) instrumental, in which the researcher focuses on the insights the case provides; and (c) multiple or collective case studies that allow for a comparative case study analysis (pp. 445-448). Stake also counts on the relationship between the readers’ experiences and the case study itself. With this proviso in mind, he argues that the data generated by case studies would often resonate experientially with some readers, thus providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Case study methodology is most useful in the present study because it helped me examine the monocultural site and cases in order to understand different cultural and religious approaches related to young female Shi’i Muslim Canadians wearing the Hijab. As a Shi’i-Muslim Canadian educator who worked in a Canadian Islamic school for 3 years, I believe that I possess an understanding of religious Muslim-Canadian communities. Indeed, I am still involved in religious and cultural activities related to young females in the Southern Ontario region. Most importantly, this research focused on Shi’i Muslim Canadian females who come from diverse cultural backgrounds and who live between their

own social worlds in their community as well as that of the dominant group. Figure 3 illustrates this study's integrated methodology, which represents the social world of Shi'i Muslims in North America.

The literature that examines Muslim minority youth groups (Chung, 2011; Eriksen, 2010; Kincheloe, 2005; Phelan et al., 1998) opened my eyes to the fact that my participants' identities and their experiences in their community and their schools are influenced by the intersectionality of their religious or political affiliation, as well as their gender (Bosacki, 2005b; Eriksen, 2010; Stonebanks, 2008). Using Phelan et al.'s (1998) social world model helped me examine the internal (i.e., ethnical, cultural, religious) diversity of the Muslim community and the external diversity (i.e., the values of the dominant group) of the participants' social worlds.

Phelan et al.'s model encouraged me to examine more deeply the intersectionalities of religious, social, cultural, and political differences that create the social boundaries of my participants' social worlds represented by their own community and schools. After reading Takim's (2009) study showing the diversity of Shi'i groups in North America, and from my own personal experiences as a member of this group, I found this model provides the opportunity of examining the ethnic and the cultural differences that exist for participants within the same community (Lebanese, Iraqi) and the dominant group (school). Examining the construction of the minority identity within different social situations was highly recommended across various disciplines (Chung, 2011; Eriksen, 2010; Hart, 2005; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002; Krause et al., 2001; Phelan et al., 1998; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003).

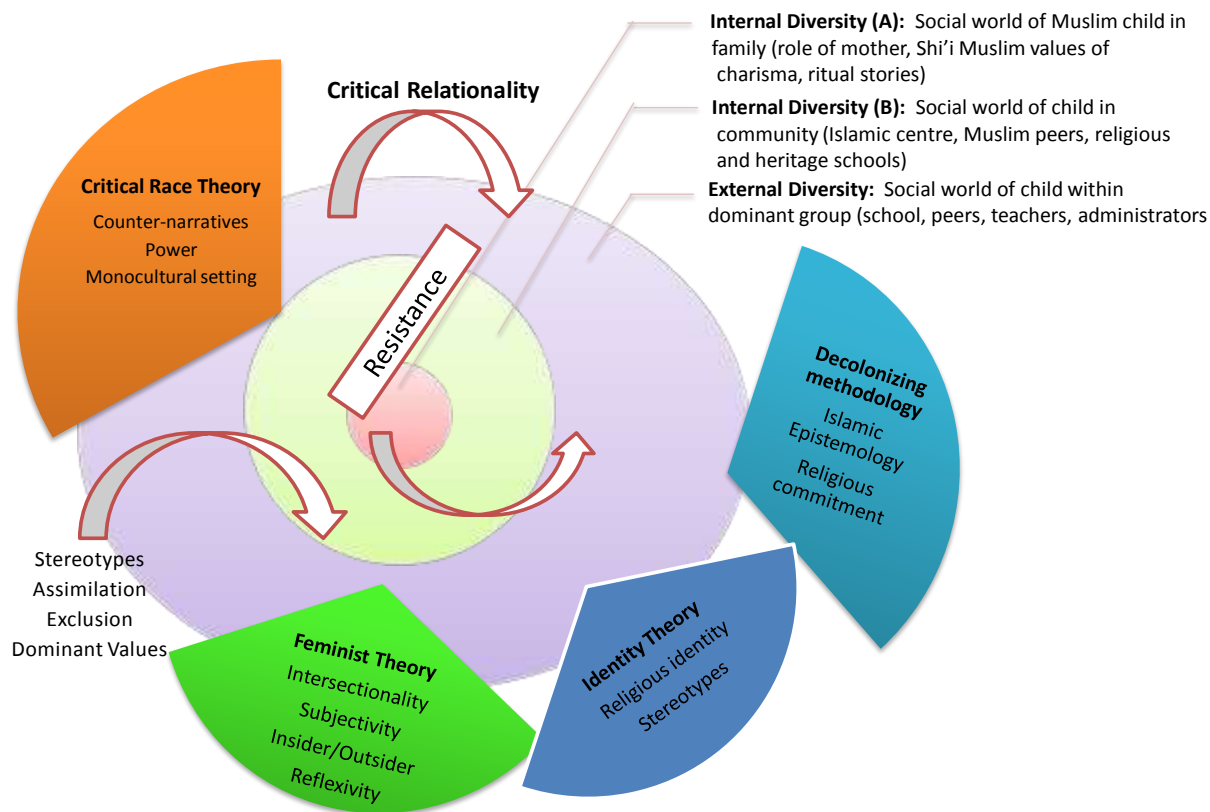


Figure 3. Integrated methodology.

Minority Identity and “Othering” Approaches to Research

Stonebanks (2008) acknowledges the importance of being aware of the concept of “others.” He incorporates the latter perspective by referring to the social boundaries that exist between the respective social worlds of Muslim and the dominant groups: “the ethnic group’s cultural identity is formed by the group’s self-identification and by the others’ perspectives of the group”; when “the relationship is unbalanced, as is the case with Indigenous groups who experienced oppression, it may be and usually is stigmatizing (p. 305)⁶. Stonebanks also refers to indigenous methodology in his discussion. Indigenous methodology is used in the present study in order to avoid any harm or misrepresentation to the Muslim community. However, it is important to point out that the history of creating “others” contributed to how Muslim students interact in their own social world and the larger dominant world. There are inherent tensions, since the development of their ethnic identity is influenced by self and the perceptions of others that have been shaped by the history of colonization and recent and political incidents in the Middle East (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Bayoumi, 2008; Haddad et al., 2006; Kincheloe, 2008; Said, 1997).

Also, Stonebanks (2008) notes how the Muslim community may be harmed by the misrepresentation of Islamic knowledge by those whose research may be biased by stereotypes and certain agendas that reveal an East–West binary and view Muslims as “others.” Stonebanks points out that such research tends to associate Islamic knowledge with irrational fundamentalism, and in this case,

⁶ Stonebanks uses the term “indigenous” in the context where Muslims are viewed as “the Other.”

what is lost is the diversity of Muslim perspectives toward the West's own concepts of self because it does not fit with the West's own construction of the Other. This is an important consideration if the desire is to move away from the simplicity of dehumanizing through stereotypes to humanizing through individualizing counter-narratives. (p. 307)

Stonebanks's appreciation of the diversity of the Muslim community and his criticism of the dehumanizing effect of "otherness" is similar to Boyce Davies's (1994) critical relationality through which the specificity of others plays a significant role in negotiating multiple identities amongst racialized groups. In this respect, the integration of Western theories (e.g., feminist, critical race, and identity theories) and the multiple discourses of others (Shi'is' discourses within the global Muslim majority) are needed to approach humanization in which the negotiation of multiple identities of racialized Muslim groups are viewed from multiple locations. Specifically, within the Shi'i Muslim context, I refer to the Islamic epistemology represented by Shari'atī (2011a), an intellectual revolutionary activist who adopted an epistemology that posits human knowledge is inseparable from its ethical existence and human social relations. Under this epistemology, human knowledge can never be objective and is always open to question while godly knowledge is the pure absolute. As Shari'ati argues, the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and humanity is tied in with good and evil ethics, in which the historical struggle between good (represented by religion of revolution and monotheism) and bad (represented by religion of legitimization through the corrupted Islamic government and multitheists) arises and continues into the future.

Shari‘atī’s (2011a) intention to situate knowledge with the binary of good and evil may be due to his Shi’i upbringing; he explicitly parallels the martyrdom of Imam Hussein to so-called good religion as the Shi’is believe that Imam Hussein held the responsibility to command good and forbid evil. However, Shari‘atī is open to critical hermeneutics in which questioning is highly appreciated in order to become closer to godly knowledge that is aligned with *Tawheed* (or oneness). Shari‘atī was influenced by Marxism, which can be seen through his revolutionary language against power and oppressive systems, but he was unique in that he examined those ideas through Islamic ontology, mainly through a metaphor of good (monotheist) and bad (multitheist), and how individuals are called upon to be active agents in the process of political and social change. Such ontology parallels Stonebanks’s explanation of the need to acknowledge Islam’s ethical perspectives and to consider a methodology and research that benefit the Muslim community. Here, Shari‘atī and Stonebanks count on elevating Islamic knowledge and the social responsibility that is needed to benefit the Muslim community. Again, my insider insight provides me with a critical stance that creates a resistant discourse that in turn responds to privileged secular and legitimized Western theories.

With this proviso in mind, I developed my methodology for this research by relying on the intersectionalities of the religious, social, and political aspects of Islam and their influences on my participants’ experiences in their social worlds. The participants’ responses to the dominant group’s social world resonates with the critical race theory that addresses the conflicts raised by the hegemonic power of the dominant group and highlights the need for more researchers as insiders in order to address minority groups’ resistance and their own strategies to preserve their social and cultural values (Ladson-

Billings & Donner, 2005). Critical race theory encourages the narratives of people of colour and values the research undertaken by insiders as there is a common understanding between the researcher and participants (Dunbar, 2008).

Stonebanks (2008) elevated the role of the insider through his counter-narrative developed largely from his experiences as a young child in Iran. He describes his grandmother, who was a Shi'i Muslim Iranian religious woman, in order to touch upon the positive moral values of Islam (e.g., spirituality through prayer, forgiveness, and religious practices). He argues that insider researchers share similar experiences with the Muslim community and those experiences are diverse and powerful in responding to the stereotypes of the Muslims. Although he acknowledges that some insiders also touch upon their negative experiences associated with cultural and religious differences, the goal of Muslim research should be geared towards what can benefit the Muslim community.

Similarly, I considered the complex diversity of my participants' backgrounds and thus, in preparing my interview questions, I looked over the questions that addressed my participants' experiences with wearing the Hijab in their schools, their community, and their home, and also their own understanding of their religious and cultural values associated with wearing the Hijab in order to examine the development and the negotiation of their multiple identities within their social worlds. In many cases, I repeated the same question but in different social locations (see Appendix A). In my data collection and analysis, I worked on examining the themes based on the lived experiences of my participants and their understanding of their identities within the values of their social world and the dominant worlds. By doing so, I respond to Stonebank's (2008)

appreciation of the critical pedagogy and his call for humanization in Muslim research through the adoption of counter-narratives that respond to dilemmas that Muslims face recently due to misconceptions and stereotypes that are rooted in the past and continue to the present. Such humanization of research thus can replace the dehumanization of other research about the Muslim community by adopting an interfaith dialogue and critical consciousness (i.e., being aware of the diversity that exists within the same Muslim community and the political and the social events and aspects that influence the experiences of Muslims in different social situations) and thus connecting the methodology with the Islamic knowledge that is highly recommended in order to reinforce the moral values of Shi'i Islam's ritual stories, as well as the similarities between Islam and Christianity (Stonebanks, 2008). In the following sections, I explain through the participant selection, the data collection, and the data analysis how I approached the subject through the intersectionalities of religious, social, political, and gender elements of my participants' identities within their social worlds.

Participant Selection

Ten elementary-aged female Shi'i Muslim Canadian students participated in in-depth interviews that contributed to an understanding of their schooling experiences in predominantly White communities and their interaction with the dominant culture. The number of participants allowed for multiple case studies analysis (Stake, 2000). The 10 participants were recruited through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008) based on five criteria: (a) the participants' families were affiliated with Shi'i Islam in terms of following religious practices and/or beliefs (e.g., observing Ramadan, praying, fasting, etc.); (b) the participants' mothers could communicate in English; (c) the participants

were born in Canada and attend regular classroom settings (due to my research focus on religious and cultural identities rather than language issues); (d) the participants attended public schools whose student body comprised mostly White students; and (e) the participants currently wore the Hijab. It is important to mention that two pairs of the participants were sisters, and this is due to the limited responses of the letter of invitation that I received and that parents from one family were willing to have more than one daughter participate. The student participants were from two communities in Southern Ontario. The monocultural sites may affect the participants' experiences in terms of their exposure to the Muslim population and having access to more Muslim communities.

The distribution of Muslim students in mostly White schools may be due to the area where the Muslim families live; parents may not be able to choose the public schools for their children, as students are enrolled in schools that are closest to their homes. Consequently, if the parents live in an area that is not diverse, they can expect their children to attend a non-diverse school. As a community member, I volunteered in social activities every Saturday in two local Islamic centres affiliated with the Shi'i Muslim community. For confidentiality and the likelihood of identifying the two Shi'i Muslim centres from among the few in Southern Ontario, I did not reveal the location of the two centers used in this current study. Also, my prior involvement in the latter communities' social and cultural activities allowed me to identify and select the girls who met the criteria identified for this research.

I first approached the leaders of the two Islamic centers and provided them with an information package that described the purpose of the study and the process of data collection and analysis. After receiving the leaders' written permission, I contacted the

potential participants' mothers whom I knew on a friendly basis in order to reduce researcher–subject power relationship. Consequently, I did know some of the participants prior to the development of the research. The initial contact was made verbally with the participants' mothers during the centre's regular meetings (held on Friday and Saturday) (see Appendix B), after which I sent the information package to the mothers who were interested in the study.

After they received the information package, I met with the participants' mothers at the Islamic centres in quiet and private rooms, and went through the information letter in order to explain to them the purpose of the research and the data collection process and analysis. Following my meeting with the mothers and receiving their permission to proceed, I met with potential participants in the rooms where they had their social activities and spoke with each of them about the purpose of the research, the interviews, and the focus group meetings, and I requested their permission to participate in the study. I explained the Child Assent—Informed Consent form and how they could withdraw at any time. I then asked the potential participants to read the Child Assent form and to sign and return it sealed to the leader of the Islamic centre if they were interested in participating in the study, since all the participants live in different cities and it is convenient to have all the consent forms in the Islamic centre. There were additional families who returned the form to the leader but did not participate.

I also notified the mothers that they and their daughters would have free access to a counselling service, upon request, should they want to discuss any feelings that might possibly arise from having shared difficult experiences during the interviews and/or

focus-groups; contact information for this service was provided to them prior to the first interviews and focus-group meetings.

The week following my initial meetings with the mothers and potential participants, I received signed consent forms from 10 interested parties. I then began the interviews and the focus-group meetings on Fridays and Saturdays at the two Islamic centers over an 8-week period. I administered 10 individual interviews with five Iraqi-Canadian and five Lebanese-Canadian Shi'i Muslim girls, and a separate focus group meeting for the Iraqi and Lebanese groups, respectively. It is important to mention that I divided the participants for the focus meetings based on their friendships, and I was able to determine their friendship based on my close relationship with the participants and their mothers. The participants' close relationship eases the process of speaking about their cultural and Shi'i religious background as well as their school experiences (in my experience, Shi'i members usually are not open to share their religious experiences with others unless they have strong relationship, due to a history of oppression). I also considered their internal diversity in terms of their ethnicity based on their Lebanese and Iraqi heritage (Takim, 2008, 2009), so they would feel free to share their experiences in the focus meetings. At the completion of the study, all participants were informed about its general findings.

Theoretical Approach Used for Interviews

In this research, I strived to both examine and achieve transformative change that corresponds to my understanding of interlocking structures of race, religion, and gender in order to approach social justice. My quest for social justice is evident in my adherence to a feminist interviewing approach in research which brings forward the experiences of

marginalized groups (in my case, Shi'i Muslim women) and involves actively listening to the participants, using narrative, and an ethical approach to interviewing (Devault & Gross, 2007; Mohanty, 1991). Within feminist research, women are not merely treated as objective informants; instead, they “develop ways of conceptualizing the interviews as an encounter between women with common interests” (Devault & Gross, 2007, p. 178). In this perspective, I am inspired by the reflexivity in feminist research that is evident in (a) looking for data in multiple ways, (b) developing the strategic disclosure in which the interviewer shares personal experiences and political commitments, (c) listening for what is missed in women's talk, (d) using the narrative approach which is shaped by the values of the community, (e) considering the role of micropolitics and the macropolitics of contexts in research, and (f) being reflexively aware that interview research is shaped by cultural constructions of similarities and differences (Acker, 2000; Chase, 1995; Devault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Smith, 1987).

By referring to several points of view, I was able to incorporate and negotiate different interpretations related to my participants' beliefs (McCutcheon, 2005). Such a feminist-based approach to research provides me with insights into how I conduct my research and my responsibility towards my participants. In this respect, I acknowledge the reciprocity used in feminist qualitative research which involves the researcher's “careful use of self-disclosure in interviews and an active, subjective role for the researcher as interviewer,... asking the participants to look at and comment on the researcher's analysis” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 701). I also used reflective field notes in which I documented my thoughts and feelings, which I hoped would help “bring the unconscious into consciousness” (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 703). In my individual and focus-group interviews,

I attempted to establish nonhierarchical relationships in which I played an active role with the participants by sharing my personal opinions with them and by responding to their own questions. In other words, I was able to examine the tensions and the contradictions that arose from conducting conversations about critical and religious issues, and thereby acknowledged the multiple viewpoints of those whom McCutcheon (2005) refers to as insiders and outsiders.

The data collection and analyses considered my participants' internal diversity—for example, Lebanese or Iraqi (Takim, 2008, 2009)—and its relationship to the other dominant world. I strongly agree with Stonebanks's (2008) position that researchers conducting research on Muslim groups must ask themselves about the benefit of the research to the Muslim community, and the need to be aware of the complexity that surrounds research on Muslim groups due to their diversity and to the political and social and religious aspects that influence how Muslims negotiate their identities in the West. Accordingly, I feel responsible as a member of this community to collect the data and interpret the results while paying attention to how the participants negotiated their identities in different social worlds as well as with various political and social and religious aspects similar to the prejudices mentioned by Kincheloe (2008) or to the challenges and discrimination cited by Bosacki (2005a, 2005b).

Data Collection

After completing the participant recruitment process and scheduling the individual interviews with participants, I began collecting the data. The data collection procedures included: (a) reflective field notes documenting my own observations and experiences visiting the two communities; (b) semi-structured interviews with each of the 10 student

participants, who narrated their own personal experiences of living between cultures; and (c) two focus-group meetings with the participants, in which they discussed gender, religious, and cultural experiences related to the research questions.

Interviews

The first phase of data collection involved interviews with the five Lebanese-Canadian and five Iraqi-Canadian Shi'i Muslim females, who answered semi-structured questions regarding their personal experiences living between their social worlds or the Canadian and Islamic cultures (see Appendix A). Both the interviews were audio taped and transcribed by myself as the study's primary researcher. As a volunteer in the two Islamic centres, I was able to access a quiet room in each centre where I met with the girls for the interviews. Each interview took 45 minutes. I started with the individual interviews in order to help me plan subsequent focus-group meetings based on the girls' level of interactions (Irwin & Johnson, 2005) and their ability as young participants to articulate their schooling experiences associated with wearing the Hijab. I followed the feminist interviewing approach described earlier, so that both the interviewer and the interviewee could connect as females with similar experiences (Acker 2000; Bobb-Smith, 2003; Chase, 1995; Devault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Oakley, 1981, Smith, 1987). While it was difficult for me to maintain detachment from the participants, it was important to build a good rapport with the participants so they would feel free to speak about sensitive issues related to their religion and culture (Dunbar, 2008).

Focus-Group Meetings

The second phase of data collection involved two focus-group meetings that lasted for 1.5 hours with the five Lebanese-Canadian and the five Iraqi-Canadian Shi'i

Muslim girls during which time the participants engaged in a dialogue and openly discussed identity-related issues together (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). Simply put, “the use of a focus group is a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). The dialogue that may arise from the focus group demonstrates the degree of consensus in a group that would be difficult to obtain using other methods (Morgan, 1996; Richtermeier, 2001). Focus groups should be homogeneous regarding attributes that are related to the research topic (Morgan, 1996; Richtermeier, 2001) —in my research, the homogeneous factors include being Shi’i females wearing the Hijab, having the same ethnicity, and having strong friendships—as such homogeneity allows researchers to gain better insight into intersectional social elements such as race, gender, ethnicity, and religion. However, the participants ranged between 9-12 years of age, and I realized only later that the age factor influenced the participants’ interactions and articulation of their experiences during the focus group meetings. For instance, the younger participants were overwhelmed when they heard the older girls’ stories regarding issues related to peer discrimination and bullying. To reduce those tensions, I provided frequent breaks during the focus-group meetings.

Notwithstanding the above concern, the focus group was empowering because it allowed these somewhat silenced and isolated groups of girls to speak out about their marginalizing experiences (Madriz, 1998). The focus-group setting was helpful in encouraging the participants to talk about sensitive topics and to share their positive experiences in addition to the challenges they faced by being in predominantly White schools where they sometimes felt isolated.

Field Notes

I wrote post-interview reflections and recorded my observations in field notes that included my thoughts and insights gained from the interviews and the focus-group meetings with the participants. I used probing strategies during the interviews and focus-group meetings, such as asking participants for more information and to clarify or expand upon certain ideas that they had expressed. The semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) were very beneficial in helping me to understand my initial participants' experiences in as much detail as possible, and allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' understanding of their religion, culture, and schooling experiences, which in turn helped me to plan subsequent interviews and focus-group meetings. For instance, the interviews with the first younger and the first older participants led me to consider using modified probes and examples in order to help the other younger girls articulate their understanding of certain religious concepts and share their schooling experiences. Also, I became more aware of the potential differences between diverse and non-diverse schools' approaches to multiculturalism after interviewing some of the initial participants about their experiences in different school settings, and thus probed some of the subsequent participants in order to glean further information on that particular topic.

My various roles as a researcher and an advocate contributed to the process of producing knowledge as an extension of social agency and knowing as social practice (Dunbar, 2008). Agency refers to action, in the sense that agents act and reflect on their actions. As Weiler (1988) puts it, "in understanding individual life it is necessary to consider the power of various distinct but interrelated social forces such as gender, race, and ethnicity in shaping individual consciousness" (p. 73). Self-reflexivity is a process by

which observers map out how they are “personally involved” in the enquiry. Similarly, understanding my racial and religious ethnicity as a Shi’i Muslim female who wears the Hijab shaped my decision to document through this research the experiences of elementary-aged Shi’i Muslim females wearing the Hijab. Hartman explains that “[self-reflexivity] operates in opposition with traditional social science in which researchers are to be ‘impersonal and unbiased’ because they exclude values, feelings, political intentions, aesthetic preferences and other ‘subjective’ states from the conduct of their research” (as cited in Rhoads, 1997, p. 19). I thus considered the participants’ different responses and acknowledged their beliefs as a means of documenting and shedding light on the schooling experiences of young females who wear the Hijab and their understanding of their religious identities in Western contexts.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data (i.e., transcripts of interviews and focus-group meetings, and my field-note observations) consisted of coding and categorization according to schemas described by Creswell (2008). I began the data analysis by reading the transcripts from the individual interviews, focus-group meetings, and my observations. I read through all pieces of data several times to develop a holistic understanding of the information contained within them. I then examined how the pieces related to one another in the participants’ own social world (i.e., family and community) and the social world of the dominant group (comprising teachers, schools, peers, and administrators). From this analysis, I coded the data collected from interviews, focus-group meetings, and observations into emerging themes, and then examined the data and the emerging themes within the participants’ social world(s). Following the coding

of the interviews and the focus-group meetings, the participants were asked to review and verify the coded data, as well as my interpretations of the data. I considered Smith's (1995) method of "looking for themes" when coding the data; the five steps Smith recommends are as follows:

1. Read the transcript a number of times, using one side of the margin to note down anything that strikes you as interesting or significant about what the respondent is saying. Some of these comments may be attempts at summarizing, some may be associations/connections that come to mind; others may be your own interpretations.
2. Use the other margin to document emerging theme titles; that is, using key words to capture the essential quality of what you are finding in the text.
3. On a separate sheet, list the emerging themes and look for connections between them.
4. Produce a master list of themes, ordered coherently.
5. Add an identifier of instances. Under each master theme you should indicate where in the transcript instances of it can be found. (pp. 19-20)

Smith's (1995) suggested steps were useful for data coding, as it encouraged multiple reviews of the transcripts and provided a systematic way of organizing the data (i.e., through note-taking and list-generating). For this current study, I paid particular attention to similarities and differences in statements between and across participants in their social-world boundaries. I also noted topics or themes that I did not expect the participants to acknowledge, such as those related to their daily activities inside and outside the schools and their traumatic stories back home (which are described in further

detail in chapter 4). This method of comparison helped me to consider thematic subjects that I had not anticipated (e.g., the theme of Shi'i oppression of back home). I also became more attuned to my feelings about and responses to the young participants' stories, through which I had developed strong feelings of sympathy because of what Dunbar (2008) refers to as stories that are "shared from the heart that relives/recounts their history and culture" (p. 96). I was able to record such observations in my reflective notes throughout the process in order to maintain as much objectivity as possible.

Establishing Credibility

I incorporated a number of procedures in the study in an attempt to establish credibility. I transcribed the audio-taped interviews and focus-group meetings. When listening to the tapes, I read and reviewed the transcripts carefully to make sure there were no discrepancies between them (Creswell, 2008). I also carefully considered Creswell's (2008) work describing the process of triangulating evidence from different sources as a form of cross-validation. He recommends that researchers seek regularities in the data by comparing different participants' comments, settings, and methods to identify recurring results. In this study, I compared different comments from different participants on their experiences with wearing the Hijab in their respective schools and in their communities.

Methodological Assumptions

I undertook this study with certain methodological assumptions. First, my "insider" position as a Shi'i Muslim female wearing the Hijab and shared experiences may have enhanced my feelings of empathy and sympathy towards the study participants, which could have affected the results. While this insider positioning may have garnered

richer data, as participants may have felt more comfortable speaking to someone who had likely gone through similar challenges in negotiating their identities, I had to be careful to not project my understanding of my experiences onto the participants. I tried to ensure that their voices remained dominant throughout the interviews by sharing any personal experiences only after they had shared their own ideas and experiences, and by asking for clarification (through follow-up questions) on themes that they discussed, so as not to presume that I automatically understood what they meant. I also repeated the questions, which allowed participants ample time and opportunities to share their opinions and observations.

Second, I assumed that all participants would benefit from their participation in the focus groups, and that I would thus encourage them to share their experiences. Therefore, I was careful to watch the participants to ensure that they were not feeling stressed from hearing others' experiences. I also assumed that the case study methodology would provide a kind of richness in terms of documenting the participants' real experiences. In this current study, the participants shared real-life experiences related to their religious affiliation as Shi'i Muslims and their schooling experiences that reflected different layers of complexity in terms of student–student and teacher–student relationships.

Limitations

When qualitative methodologies are used to study a phenomenon, certain limitations prevail. This study has a relatively small number of participants. Some researchers (particularly in the quantitative field) may view this as a limitation, in that the results of this study cannot be generalized from the participants to a larger group of students. Also, two pairs of the participants were sisters and this may be viewed as a

limitation since relatively few families are represented in the current research.

Nevertheless, the current research indicates that siblings are quite individual and respond differently, even being members in the same family. Most importantly, the purpose of this research was not to generalize the experiences of all Shi'i Muslim females but rather to understand the experience of a particular minority group. As case studies are not intended to be generalized, I do not suggest that the experiences of the participants in my study may align with the experiences of all young Muslim students in Canada. Instead, I hope to provide insights into the complex social, religious, and cultural factors that may affect young Shi'i Muslim girls who wear the Hijab specifically in predominantly White educational settings in Ontario, Canada.

As discussed earlier, a feminist approach to research helped me to understand my responsibility towards the participants, in terms of acknowledging the need for the participants' voice to be fully heard in the research process, by not projecting my understanding of my experiences onto the participants. At the same time, as an insider, I realize that I may adhere to certain community norms than would, say, a non-Muslim researcher, and that my personal beliefs may restrict me with regards to who I can be, and where I can go (Sprague, 2005), both physically and ideologically, which in turn may be viewed by certain critics as a limitation in research process. To reiterate, however, this study's underlying goal requires that I hold a high standard of loyalty to the Muslim females in my community. Nonetheless, I am mindful of the implications of my insider position and, consequently, I can proceed as reflexive and transparent to my positionality in the research process by addressing multiple viewpoints as I shed light on the

experiences of Shi'i Muslim females, thus balancing the notion of any limitation attributed to my insider role.

Ethical Considerations

Once ethical clearance was obtained from Brock University (File # 10-243), an invitation information letter was sent to the selected participants. The letter outlined all research requirements, including interview and focus-group meeting questions and data collection procedures. Included in the information package to participants were two consent Forms, which also outlined the nature of the research, interview and focus-group questions, and data collection procedures. The participants' mothers were asked to sign and return the consent forms, indicating their permission (or not) for their daughter(s) to participate in the study.

I was aware that the girls would need to feel safe in order to speak about their experiences, as well as the fact that in some Muslim cultures, children are expected to listen and accept whatever directions are given to them by adults (Dupree, 2003; Hamdan 2006; Rabab'ah, 2005; Richardson, 2004). So, prior to the meetings with the participants, I provided them with a consent form in which I explained to them the purpose of the interviews and focus groups and how they were free not to respond to any question and to withdraw from the study at any time. It is also important to mention that my close relationship with the girls (through social activities and regular home visits) helped the girls to gain familiarity with me and feel safe and free to speak about their experiences.

Since the participants were likely to share some critical incidents related to their experiences in their schools, I considered strategies for reducing the risk of upsetting the girls as a result of sharing such sensitive experiences. I notified the mothers in the

informed letter and the consent form about accessing a professional counselor who also was a very active member in the Shi'i community. Moreover, my research background in cognition (specifically in teaching and learning), along with my own role and experience as a mother, made me well equipped to identify any instances of emotional distress.

Working as a homeroom elementary teacher for 5 years in Canada, I have experiences with children of varying ability levels. In addition, I made it clear to the participants at the beginning of the interviews and the focus-group meetings that they could stop at any time without penalty to them, and that they could take breaks as needed. Therefore, the participants were informed, prior to committing to participate in the study, that they could freely discontinue participation at any time.

All participants were assigned a pseudonym, which was used on all data collected during this study. This procedure was explained to participants in the consent form and discussed again prior to the interviews. It was also explained that any reporting of the data, including any subsequent professional journals or conferences, would contain only the participants' pseudonyms. All computer files are password secured, with only myself as the primary researcher having access to the raw data; while I may share the findings with my supervisor and the committee members, all data are kept confidential. Only I have access to the participant list which identifies participants by their pseudonyms, and this list is only used for administrative purposes. After the data collection procedures, each participant was sent a formal letter of thanks for participating in this study. After the data collected from this study were completely analyzed, the participants were notified of the findings of this study.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the experiences of young female Shi'i Muslim-Canadian students who wear the Hijab in predominantly White Canadian school settings where the majority of students are not non-Muslims. Secondly, I wanted to understand how elementary-aged female Shi'i Muslim-Canadian students respond to interaction between the dominant culture, their culture and Islam in their communities. Most importantly, I wanted to document the experiences of the participants in their social worlds (school, home, and community) and to provide some insights about the participants' holistic understanding of themselves through their sense of spirituality (i.e., their Shi'i belief).

Using a qualitative research design allowed me to ask semi-structured questions which enabled the participants to share their views, and thus provide real, valid, deep, and rich data. Ten participants were chosen purposefully. All the research activities complied with guidelines set by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. The two methods used to collect and record the data were one-on-one interviewing and the recording of the focus-group meetings.

I analyzed the data collected from the interviews and field notes to uncover any emerging themes that were used to understand the participants' experiences in their schools and their communities. Following the coding of the interviews, I asked the participants and their parents review these data and indicate their agreement with the researcher's interpretations, and I then re-examined the data to find areas of corroboration (Creswell, 2008).

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents results corresponding to the study's two research questions that examined the schooling experiences associated with wearing the Hijab for young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students in predominantly White Canadian school settings where the majority of the students are not Muslims. The results are organized according to emerging themes that categorize participants' identities in relation to Shi'i doctrine and participants' homes, communities, and schools. As a researcher, and with my particular religious identity, I found it challenging to remain objective during my analysis or interpretation of research materials. I thus reflected on Richardson's (1997) work referring to sacred spaces where researchers can feel safe to represent their identities and be connected to their community and passionate about their work while honouring human relationships.

As a Shi'i researcher, I want to feel safe and able to represent myself as well as my community. Moreover, I hope other educators will acknowledge and be open-minded to my role as a researcher who wants to give voice to her community and to look at my research "not [as] a site of knowledge production but a site of communion (Munro Hendry, 2007, p. 496). Accordingly, I employed feminist-based interviewing strategies that encourage openness, emotional engagement, and honesty between the interviewer and the participants (Devault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Within such a feminist interviewing ethic, personal involvement is not merely related to bias but rather to the situation where people know each other and acknowledge the participants' feelings (Oakley, 2003). Adopting this feminist approach helped me to develop reflexive skills (Lather, 1991) and self-criticism that balanced my religious and

academic identities. Moreover, as the mother of a 10-year old daughter, I found myself particularly attuned to and familiar with the young female participants' speech patterns (i.e., intonation, pitch, and volume) and body language, which helped me to ensure that the participants would feel comfortable enough to share their experiences.

The 10 audio-taped interviews and the two focus-group meetings were transcribed verbatim. I analyzed these transcriptions and my field notes to gain an understanding of the schooling experiences of young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students who wear the Hijab in predominantly White Canadian school settings, and the social differences between the dominant culture, the participants' culture, and Islam. Data from the interviews and focus meetings revealed 10 major themes and corresponding subthemes that touch upon the participants' experiences in their homes, community, and school (See Table 1 for a summary of themes and subthemes.)

Before outlining the emerging themes, it is important to present a profile of the participants in order to convey to the reader the participants' individuality that underpins this qualitative case study. Within the description of the participants, I also synthesize the reflective field notes which summarized my observations and reactions to the interviews and the focus meetings. Following this, a review of each theme is provided.

Participants

Participants included 10 Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian girls attending public schools in Southern Ontario. They were all born in Canada and ranged from 9 to 12 years of age. Five of the participants' families were originally from Lebanon and five participants' families hailed from Iraq; each participant still had family connections in the latter countries. (See Table 2 for a summary of participant profiles.)

Table 1

Study Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Martyrdom and self-sacrifice as a means for social justice	Moral values of religious ritual stories; global nature of ritual stories; female exemplary model
Transformational meaning of the Hijab	Religious purposes; difficulty of initial experiences; birthday of responsibility (Takleef); transitional meaning of the Hijab
Intersectionality between culture, religion, and gender	
Effects of visits “back home” on participants’ religious identities	Shi’i oppression of “back home”; effects of visits to shrines
“Us versus them” mentality	
Religious and complex secular dialogues	
Absence of Muslim representations in monocultural schools	Acknowledging celebrations; teachers’ limited knowledge; activities
Discrimination	Stereotypes and negative images; dislike and not favoured; bullying; “weird looks”; racial jokes
Remaining silent versus speaking out	
Participants’ recommendations for preserving their identities	Role of religious commitment in relation to age; familiarity with wearing the Hijab; teachers as advocates for others; educating others about religion; equity, moral values, and the expression of human rights

Table 2

Participants' Profiles

Name	Age	Grade	Ethnicity
Maasuma	9	3	Lebanese
Kawthar	11	5	Lebanese
Rukaya	12	6	Lebanese
Zahra	10	5	Lebanese
Noor	9	3	Lebanese
Tabarak	12	6	Iraqi
Sukayna	12	6	Iraqi
Yasmeen	10	4	Iraqi
Batoul	12	6	Iraqi
Zeina	9	4	Iraqi

I interviewed the participants in Islamic centres located in two cities in South Ontario. The following section provides a brief description of each participant, using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The Lebanese group comprised Maasuma, Kawthar, Rukaya, Noor and Zahra, while the Iraqi group included Sukayna, Tabarak, Batoul, Zeina, and Yasmeen.

Maasuma

Maasuma is a Lebanese-Canadian Shi'i Muslim student who was born in Canada. She was in grade 3 and was 9 years of age at the time I interviewed her. Maasuma identified herself as a "normal girl" who enjoys sports. Maasuma grew up in a non-diverse city and attended two public schools in which she was the only Muslim student. During the first individual interview, she stated explicitly that it was the first time she had spoken to someone about her experiences. She was shy and I realized that it was not easy for her to articulate certain concepts related to Shi'i doctrine. During the interview, she referred to herself as a Muslim girl and she cautiously shared certain critical incidents that happened to her in the schools. She is aware of the importance of being in a diverse environment and she hopes there will be more girls like her in her current school.

Kawthar

Kawthar is an 11-year old Lebanese-Canadian girl. She was in grade 5 and began wearing the Hijab when she was in grade 3. A dynamic and very social individual, she had attended two public schools. She was not the only Muslim student in her previous school, but she and her sister are the only students wearing the Hijab in her current school. In the individual interview, Kawthar talked openly about her experiences; though she indicated that she might not be comfortable speaking about some of her experiences,

she stated that she wanted to talk to someone about her experience as a Shi'i girl who wears the Hijab. She defined herself as a "normal girl" who is no different than anyone else. She was inspired by her older sister and referred to her a lot during the interview. She also believed that personality is very important in determining human relationships, regardless of individuals' attire.

Rukaya

Rukaya is a Lebanese-Canadian Shi'i Muslim girl. She was in grade 6 and was 12 years old when I interviewed her. Rukaya is very humorous and friendly individual who enjoys music and sports. She associates herself strongly with Shi'i doctrine when she differentiates between Sunni and Shi'i thoughts and the way that women of both denominations wear the Hijab. Rukaya witnessed the effects of warfare during a visit to Lebanon and this incident influenced her decision to wear the Hijab, and she emphasized the importance of doing so to her mother and her sister Kawthar.

Zahra

Zahra is a Lebanese-Canadian Shi'i Muslim girl. She was 10 years old and in grade 5 when I met with her, and she was the only Muslim student in her school. She also identified herself as a "normal girl" who enjoys fashion and who cares a lot about her attire. During a visit to Lebanon at age 8, she started observing the custom of wearing the Hijab.

Noor

Noor is a 9-year old Lebanese-Canadian student who was in grade 3 at the time of the interview. She had attended two public schools where she was the only Muslim student wearing the Hijab. She is very sensitive, shy, and somewhat energetic; she

moved around a lot during the interview and needed frequent breaks in order to complete the interview. She was quite attached to her mother and reflected on her mother's role in the school and outside the school. She was very nervous during the focus meeting; hearing the experiences of other participants upset her and she asked me if she could leave the room.

Tabarak

Tabarak is a 12-year old Iraqi-Canadian Iraqi girl who was in grade 6 when interviewed for the study. Tabarak was identified as a gifted student and she attended two schools; the first was Islamic and the second was a public school. She was very knowledgeable and quite precocious in her discussion of concepts related to religion and politics. Tabarak took after her mother, who is a well-known activist in the Muslim community. She also connected herself to “back home” in Iraq and shared some critical incidents about her family back home that influenced her understanding and her commitment to explain her interest in religion to others.

Sukayna

Sukayna is a very outspoken and active 12-year old Iraqi-Canadian girl. She had attended two public schools—one that is diverse and one that is non-diverse. She was aware of the diverse school's policies and role regarding curriculum and other activities. She relates strongly to her Shi'i doctrine and was able to engage in deep discussions on issues related to religion, race, and identity.

Yasmeen

Yasmeen is a 10-year old Iraqi-Canadian Iraqi girl who was in grade 4 at the time of interview. She was very shy and was the only girl in her school who wore the Hijab.

Yasmeen enjoys reading and painting; she strives to “be cool” and to befriend non-Muslim students in order to be accepted and welcomed in the school.

Batoul

Batoul is a 12-year old Iraqi-Canadian girl. She had completed grade 3 in an Islamic school after which she attended a public school. Batoul is very sensitive to issues related to racism and was very mature in articulating her experiences. She sees herself as a “normal girl” and refers to human values that are common among all individuals regardless of their religion and race. She was able to articulate various meanings related to religion and human relationships.

Zeina

Zeina is an Iraqi-Canadian girl who was 9 years old at the time of the interview. She strongly related to the Shi'i doctrine, and very patiently advocated her beliefs to her sister Batoul. Zeina is shy and lowered her voice when sharing her stories. She identified herself as a “normal girl” who enjoys fashion and playing games. She was able to provide further analysis of religious practices than could the other participants in her age group.

Researcher's Reflexivity in Data Analysis: Relevance of Participants' Age,

Personality, and Ethnicity

Generally speaking, all of the participants seemed excited by the prospect of talking about their experiences. Before meeting with the participants, I met with their mothers who told me their daughters anticipated that I might have the power to support them and perhaps rectify some of their concerns regarding their minoritized status in school. With this proviso in mind, I emphasized to all participants (and their mothers)

that the primary purpose of this doctoral study was to shed light on the experiences of Shi'i Muslim female students who wear the Hijab in monocultural school settings, rather than to effectuate any immediate or short-term change in the participants' respective schools or in the broader education system. Here again, I began to question my outsider and insider roles. Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I kept on having an inner dialogue where I repeatedly questioned my research's purpose. I wondered, am I the mediator in these girls' social worlds? Which social world is the predominant one for them? And what exactly is my responsibility towards them? Knowing me at the personal level rather than as a distanced researcher, these girls not only hoped but believed that I would be capable of truly making a difference. After all, that is a desired outcome of my study, but the question is, how can I abide by academic criteria and at the same time balance my role as a member of a community that trusted me wholeheartedly? As I reflectively questioned myself, I gained a sense of self-awareness of my position during this research that helps put things in perspective. I was constantly trying to balance my roles and this pushed me towards a "reflexivity of discomfort" that Hamdan (2009) identifies as revealing "aspects of my identity that I did not reveal in my research endeavour" (p. 378).

As a Canadian Arab Muslim researcher, Hamdan (2006) shares her use of reflexivity and the concept of insider/outsider roles in conducting her work. She refers to Subedi's explanation of the discomfort that is created due to being an insider. She also counts on the reflexivity that encompasses the limitations of the knowledge of the insider and the ethical issues related to research in a certain minority group. In this respect, as an insider, the tensions, the power differences, and the limitations are always

questioned during my research process. Furthermore, similar to Hamdan, the most significant limitation that I experienced was going through complex emotions and pain to the extent that my identity began to integrate with the participants': "was I representing the narratives of my research participants or was I representing my narrative of their narratives. Being vigilant about the limits of representing others has helped me to continue questioning the limits of my insider knowledge" (Hamdan, 2009, p. 378).

Moreover, Hamdan counts on the gender discourses of Muslim women's experiences both in the West and in the Middle East through the misrepresentation and exotic oriental images of Muslim women in the West and the misapplication of the Islamic law in the Middle East by males. I am similar to Hamdan in my quest to challenge the institutional marginalization of Muslim women in the West through my research. However, my reflexivity is unique because it combines my religious minority identity as a woman of Shi'i faith who witnessed several oppressive incidents in the Middle East as well as a minority member of a Muslim community in the West. Most importantly, my religious belief as a Shi'i woman added a different layer of complexity to my reflexivity. This is due to specific Shi'i ideology that identifies the meaning of sacrifice through the example of the household of the prophets, whose teaching is to challenge injustice, even as females; they set an example where female strength and leadership potential are redefined in the role of the exemplary model of Sayeda Zainab. Thus, my reflexivity connects the past to the present in which I feel compelled to follow Sayeda Zainab's footsteps and raise the voice of Shi'i females.

My reflexivity developed through the following stages: (a) First, I gained an awareness of my insider/outsider roles through the literature review of women of colour whose writing is manifested by a spirituality that leads them to produce new knowledge; (b) I connected my religious spirituality enriched by the sacrifice of the household of the prophet and the female exemplary role of Sayeda Zainab with the strength and the spiritual energy of women of colour in terms of rechallenging marginalization and injustice; (c) I then balanced my insider and outsider roles by adopting integrated methodology in which my religious values were acknowledged and provided me with faith and strength with my perseverance to complete this research; and (d) I gained reflexive skills that allowed me to gradually carve out a space in which I became aware of my multiple roles in different contexts and times. For instance, my reflexivity allowed me to be more conscious of my role as a mother in addition to my role as a researcher and a member of the community. Throughout the interviewing process, I kept on treating these girls like my own daughters: “I feel when I talked to those girls as a mother who wants to protect her child. When those girls shared with me their critical incidents, my heart was broken. Their experiences took me back to my childhood when I was disciplined due to my religious affiliation” (Fartousi, Sukayna post-interview field notes). Thus, those moments of sadness and empathy were a double-edged sword as those moments reminded me of my traumatic cultural memories when I experienced oppression and discrimination during my school days.

Still, such moments motivated me with the perseverance to voice these girls and break their silence. Specifically, I felt my soul was a part of these girls to the extent that I used the first person “we” in my reflections on those moments: “Those moments

pushed me to work harder and harder to document the experiences of those little girls. I do have hope that one day we will be accepted” (Fartousi, Batoul post-interview field notes).

All the participants acknowledged their gender issues as normal girls who liked sports, reading, shopping, and fashion. All the participants demonstrate their desire to be normal while being perceived as being different. This relates both to Chung (2011) and to Akhtar (2007), who confirm that Muslim youth develop an understanding of themselves and their world through their interactions in and with multiple settings, and they work towards “the successful integration of various experiences of the self into a coherent self-image” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 120).

It is also interesting to note how the Lebanese-Canadian groups were more fashion conscious than the Iraqi-Canadians. For instance, Kawthar, Rukaya, and Zahra spoke about their love of fashion and how they were always praised by the teachers because of their outfits (Focus-group meeting). On the other hand, the Iraqi-Canadian groups cited reading and sports as their favourite hobbies (Focus-group meetings). Tabarak even critiqued the gendered stereotypes that associated girls “with pink and dolls” and confirmed how she favoured sport and reading instead: “I am a normal girl who likes reading and sport and not what others think, that all girls like pink and dolls” (Tabarak, interview transcripts).

Upon commencing my discussions with the participants, it became apparent that age played an important role in their understanding of the meaning of the Hijab. Participants who were 12 years old indicated deeper insight into the Hijab’s symbolic meaning; for instance, they differentiated between Shi’i and Sunni doctrine, correlated

the Hijab with Shi'i moral values, and elaborated on Hijab-related discrimination on both a global as well as local scale. However, the participants' level of confidence in discussing sensitive issues related to their experiences with wearing the Hijab appeared to be affected by their personalities in addition to their age. For example, consider my following reflection recorded after my interview with Batoul:

Batoul—who was 12 years old—was very strong in articulating her experiences, and her connections to human values were very powerful. But she was very sensitive when she addressed the discrimination that she faced in the school. She squeezed her hands tightly when she was talking about the boy who made fun of her. I stopped the interview and had a break. (Post-interview field notes)

Batoul's younger sister Zeina addressed such issues more confidently: "she was smiling and even laughing when she remembered those bullying incidents and instead remembered the positive sides of the stories—where her friends stood up for her" (Post-interview field notes). Rukaya and Sukayna, who were the same age as Batoul, seemed to care less about the bullying and focused instead on educating others about their religions.

In addition to age-related differences, I also noticed how the Lebanese and the Iraqi groups' communication patterns influenced the participants' interactions in the focus meetings, whereby some speakers were either encouraged or discouraged to share their experiences with others. For instance, I noted the following incident that transpired during the Lebanese-Canadian girls' focus group: "Maasuma was hesitant to continue her talk about the crazy hair day when Rukaya and Zahra started laughing loudly and interrupted her." I was not happy with their behaviours as my role as

researcher in terms of observation connects to my role as mother and community member in terms of protecting the girls: “They should instead encourage Maasuma and support her for sharing her story” (Focus meeting field notes). On the other hand, participants in the Iraqi-Canadian group were very serious; they listened attentively and supported the other speaker when she had difficulty articulating her experience:

I was inspired by how Tabarak and Sukayna clarified what Batoul and Zeina were talking about, regarding the importance of being familiar with the Hijab in a place that was not diverse. They waited till Batoul finished her words and then added to her ideas. (Focus meeting field notes)

Overall, I felt that the participants’ age differences somewhat hindered the focus meetings, especially in relation to the younger participants’ ability to freely discuss their experiences. Specifically, it appeared that the younger participants may have been inhibited by the older girls’ attitudes regarding critical incidents (such as bullying and/or other peer discrimination) discussed during the focus meetings, or at the very least they may have developed a more pessimistic outlook towards such incidents. Consequently, I realized that broaching stressful topics such as discrimination may not be the best approach for the focus meetings: “I was sad when Noor commented how those stories were scary and how it looked like she would have many troubles in upper grades because of the Hijab” (Focus meeting field notes). Nevertheless, I was inspired by the younger girls’ courage and patience as they negotiated their experiences, and also by the recommendations they provided for their respective teachers and schools. Those little girls were a living reminder that one should always remain hopeful and open to hearing others’ stories.

Themes Derived From Interviews, Field Notes, and Focus Meetings

As noted earlier, the themes that emerged from the collected data touched upon the experiences and the values of the participants' in their social worlds of home, community, and schools (see Figure 4).

Themes that related to the values of home and community included the following:

(a) martyrdom and self-sacrifice as a means for social justice; (b) transformational meaning of the Hijab; (c) intersectionality between culture, religion, and gender; and (d) effects of visits "back home" on participants' religious identities. Themes that were related to the participants' social world of schools were as follows: (a) "us versus them" mentality; (b) religious and complex secular dialogues; (c) absence of Muslim representations in monocultural schools; (d) discrimination; (e) remaining silent versus speaking out; and (f) participants' recommendations for preserving their identities. The following section discusses each of the above themes, along with their corresponding subthemes, as applicable at home, community, and school.

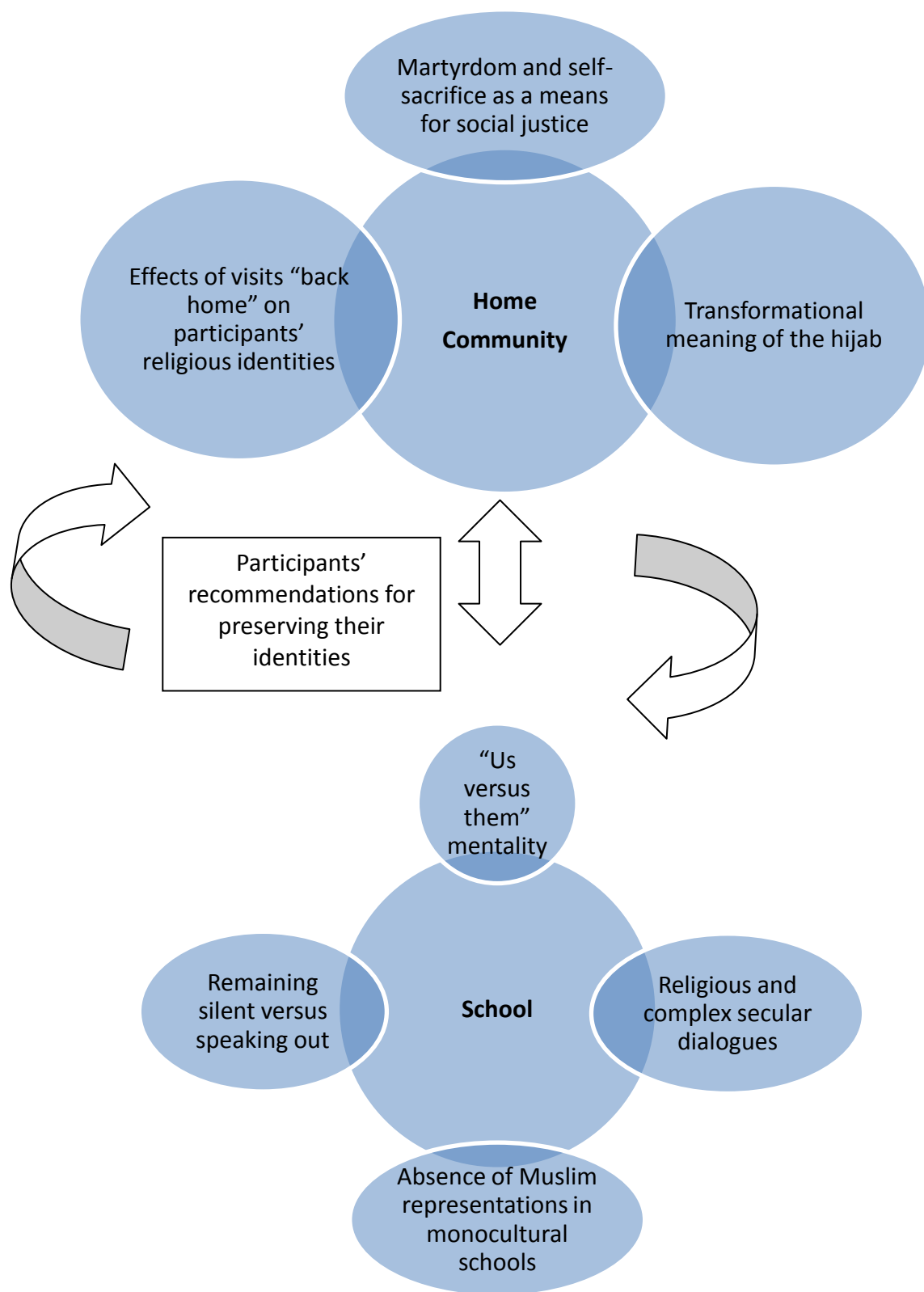


Figure 4. Themes and Shi'i Muslim females' social worlds.

Home and Community

All of the participants spoke at length about the extensive support system that they have within their community. They listed the Islamic centre as a significant source of motivation and self-confidence, and a space where they feel like they belong. They mentioned the extensive network of friends that they met in the Islamic centre who offered social and emotional support, and the fact that they all have shared similar life experiences. The participants also acknowledged the role of the Muslim community on strengthening their beliefs and reminding them of the ritual stories that empower their understanding towards freedom and their rights, even if they are in the minority. The Islamic center helped the participants to meet other girls who share the same experiences and thus compensated for their feeling of being the only ones in their schools wearing the Hijab:

- I got to know about the Hijab from people in my community who wear Hijab. It was not confusing, as I learned a lot about it. It is not a big deal if the school does not acknowledge Eid, as I celebrate it in the mosque. If there is no mosque, I feel lost. In this place, I meet people like me. My sister wears Hijab and she made my mom wear Hijab too. The mosque is very helpful and they have many activities such as camping and sleepovers. I am glad to have the mosque. My life will be different without it. (Kawthar, interview transcripts)
- I feel very happy to go to the mosque. There are many girls like me and we are the same. They do not make fun of my skin colour or my Hijab. Once a friend told me, “You are very courageous to wear Hijab alone in the public school. I do not

dare to wear it as I am the only Muslim girl in the school.” (Noor, interview transcripts)

- It is good that we have a good environment like the markaaaz [Islamic centre] where we come every week and we learn Arabic, deen [religion], our culture. The people I see in the centre are my closest friends. I hung out with them, especially with Eid. I understand the meaning of Hijab because of the environment of the centre. We pray and go to this center for a long time. I really felt left out when I saw all my friends in the centre wearing Hijab and I was not. So I decided to wear it at age 8. (Rukaya interview transcripts)
- My role model is the centre. They are the ones who encourage us to do the religious stuff. We learn deen, Quran, and we have Ashura contests where we have to memorize questions. (Kawthar, interview transcripts)
- When I was young, I was inspired by my cousins and others who wear Hijab in the centre and was encouraged to wear it. (Zahra, interview transcripts)
- I feel more with Muslim people in the mosque than in the school. I can have fun with my friends and learn more about Islam. (Zeina, interview transcripts)
- Going to the mosque makes me want to wear the headscarf. When I was young, I decided to wear the headscarf early but my mom said you can’t change your mind; once you wear it, you can’t take it off. So I waited till I turned 9. (Yasmeen, interview transcripts)
- I like to see more Muslim girls and the centre is the place where I find many like me. (Maasuma, interview transcripts)

The participants also acknowledged the role of the mosque in teaching them the moral values such as respect and human rights that guide them towards acting properly:

- I learned in the religious class in the mosque that it is important to have good personality so when people meet with you they will not think about you in a negative way. So if you had a bad attitude and bad personality and you're mean to people, then they will think that Islam is bad. I love coming here. I have many friends like me. When I listen to sheikh [the religious scholar], I learn about how people judge us and how we have to stand up for ourselves. I learn a lot about Islam that I never knew. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)
- I feel happier to go to the mosque than the school because there are more people that are the way I am. I feel I am more respected. The lessons I took in the centre were very helpful. I learned about manners and human rights, and you should be respectful to other religions. (Batoul, interview transcripts)

All of the participants acknowledged their mothers as integral support systems. One of them referred to her mother as vital in helping her to explore and negotiate her religious and ethical role as a Muslim girl who wears the Hijab. In sharing their initial experiences with wearing the Hijab, all of the participants spoke about their mothers' advocacy roles in preparing them to understand the meaning of the Hijab. I also realized that the more the mother is educated, the more the girls are aware of the meaning of the Hijab and other religious practices. Zeina spoke about her mother who took many lessons about the proper way of reciting the Quran and how her mother in turn taught the young girls in the community the proper recitation. Zeina reinforced that she learned from her mother the proper way of reciting the Quran as well as other Islamic law related to

Muslim females. Tabarak, for example, adopted her mother's views on the responsibility of educating others about Islam and was inspired by her mother's active role in the Muslim community. This is similar to the research done by Mossali (2009) who interviewed a successful Muslim female teenager student who took after her mother who in turn was highly educated and active in the community.

The participants' social world of home and community encompassed various religious and cultural beliefs that provided them with strength, confidence, and spiritual energy to challenge their tensions and their marginalization and provided them with a safe space. All the participants shared similar views with respect to the role of the Muslim community and home on nurturing their self-identification. This is similar to much research undertaken on the Muslim-Canadian experience in which the participants counted on their communities to provide them with warm and encouraging environments (Akseer, 2011; Hoodfar, 2003; Shalabi & Taylor, 2011). However, all the research corresponded to Muslims either in middle- or high schools, though there were suggestions to include elementary-aged participants in future studies (Shalabi & Taylor, 2011). The current study confirmed that even elementary-level female students acknowledged the role of the Muslim community in enhancing their identity affirmation. Most importantly, in the current research, all the themes related to home and community focused on the values of the ritual stories (e.g., self-sacrifice, female empowerment, care, and standing up for social justice), and even the meaning of the Hijab corresponded to such values. Those values were even traced in themes related to the context of schools in terms of the participants' interaction with their peers and with their teachers.

Martyrdom and self-sacrifice as a means for social justice. This theme reflects the Shi'i understanding of the concept of martyrdom. All of the participants described how they were inspired by the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. The Shi'i ritual stories influenced the participants' understanding of humanity and social justice, as well as their interactions with others. Some of the participants referred to the day of Ashura and associated the story of Imam Hussein and his sacrifice to moral values related to thinking and caring about others. These participants connected and integrated Imam Hussein's ritual story to present-day issues and lived values that encompass the relationship between brothers and sisters, empathy for others, the importance of freedom and the right for religious belief, globalization, and the importance of female leadership roles.

Moral values of religious ritual stories. Within this subtheme, the participants referred to the moral lessons that they learned from Imam Hussein. For instance, Kawthar and Rukaya mentioned that hearing the story of how Sayeda Zainab supported her brother Imam Hussein, both before and after his death, enriched their understanding of the importance of the relationship between brother and sisters. Consequently, they both learned to be nice to others and to have patience and tolerance:

It is sad how Imam Hussein sacrificed his life. The relationships between brothers and sisters were strong and they were peaceful. (Kawthar, interview transcripts)

The stories of Imam Hussein inspire me. Because they self-sacrifice for other people. That's what really counts, being nice, loving people, and caring about them and not getting back against them. People get back at people these days. I usually get back at people these days, but when I remembered how Imams

do not get back, I stopped. Imams just decided to fight for the sake of real Islam.

(Rukaya, interview transcripts)

For Sukayna, the story of Imam Hussein reminds her of the importance to stand up for what she believes in, and she associates with Shi'i religious ideology that posits the martyrdom of Imam Hussein was the only means to preserve the religion:

I learned that Imam basically died for us and we could hold on to our religion, and without his sacrifice Islam would not be the same. These people sacrificed their lives for us just so that Islam would be still around today and we would not be slaves for other people. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

In short, the Imam Hussein narratives empowered the participants and instilled in them the patience and acceptance that alleviated their struggles associated with being visible minorities and their sense of being alone. For instance, Zeina commented that she learned through the Imam Hussein story that it is normal for minority groups to struggle to maintain their rights, much like Imam Hussein who along with his family fought against adversity to uphold his beliefs:

The story of Imam Hussein made me feel I am not the only one being pushed and being different. I learned that there's a big problem for other people to face, so I should not be whining about my problem. [Imam Hussein and his family] were really thirsty and kept losing their friends and family and I feel sad how other people were mean to them. They were better than those bad guys. (Zeina, interview transcripts)

Global nature of ritual stories. Tabarak provided an in-depth analysis of the story of Imam Hussein. To her, reflecting on the stories of Imam Hussein is a lifelong learning

process that should never stop. Tabarak commented on globalization and how it is important to stand up for one's beliefs. She felt that the stories play an important role in teaching others about morals and beliefs:

You can also learn from the Imam Hussein story that he stands for what he believes and you can also stand for what you believe. The world is a big place and you are probably a small part of it so if you stand for what you believe in, it helps. I know a story where this man was trying to child labour [delivery]; he learns and understands. So I think we can learn and understand from reading stories. You don't just learn and stop. You always keep on learning from Imam Hussein.

(Tabarak, focus meeting transcripts)

Tabarak even reflected critically on the meaning of the Imam's martyrdom and questioned the reason behind this sacrifice. She also connected the historic past event to the present and commented on the need to defend one's religious rights, as well as the new Muslim generation's responsibility to educate others about Islam, through modern media such as the Internet:

I really think that if you think of the story deeply and the morals out of it, some people just mourn. And I'm not saying it's not right to mourn, but some people just mourn about it and not get the morals out of it. It is important to understand why this happened. You think of how they stood for their rights; when you think if they can fight for their rights and raise their voice for what they believe, then we can do the same thing and be committed to our religious practices. It is easier now, with the Internet and stuff, to spread the word; you can really spread the word even when you are really young. (Tabarak, focus meeting notes)

Tabarak reinforces the values of the ritual stories and their impact globally. She shared what many of global feminists addressed in their research about the responsibility of raising the voice of justice in other parts of the worlds (Miles et al., 2001). Similar to Tabarak, Sukayna also connects the Hijab to globalization and calls on others to respect the Hijab in schools since the custom is practiced in many places across the world: “The school should be cool with the Hijab. And just go with it as there are many Muslims around the world [who wear] the Hijab” (Sukayna, interview notes). The latter view is aligned with those of Martino and Rezai-Rushti (2008), who call for connecting the meaning of the Hijab to national and international contexts. The meaning of the Hijab is not merely related to local context but to various historical and social contexts across the world. The current study made the connection of the meaning of the Hijab to the historical contexts that continued to the present in terms of how the importance of the Hijab is connected to the ritual stories: “Hijab is important especially when Sayeda Zainab asked the soldier to change the direction of the heads on the arrows from the women who were not covered well” (Sukayna, interview transcripts). This resonates with Mahfoodh’s (2008) research that also connects the Hijab to Shi’i ritual stories, as participants in her research were highly influenced by Sayeda Zaynab and her attention to veiling.

Female exemplary model. Throughout the interviews and focus meetings, the participants touched upon the Shi’i understanding of the female role that is exemplified through the historical story of Sayeda Zainab. The girls all gained their strength through her and the way that she represents women’s power against oppression. The youngest participants used simple statements to describe how they are inspired by Sayeda Zainab.

Some even connected the importance of the Hijab to Sayeda Zainab's personality and how she persevered through many hardships to preserve her belief system, which includes the ritual wearing of the Hijab. In this respect, the historical female role model encouraged the participants to wear the Hijab and to stand up for what they believe in. Zahra shared that, "I learned from Sayeda Zainab to be strong and stand for what I believe in. She cares about her brother and stays with him till his death" (Interview transcripts), while Kawthar observed that "I can see Hijab through Sayeda Zainab as she wore it. I learned to be confident and strong like her. She was much stronger than anyone else" (Interview transcript).

Some of the participants referred to Sayeda Zainab's political speech against the corrupted government and correlated this speech with the importance of fighting for one's rights. Again, the participants referred to the Shi'i ideology of pain and struggle in order to attain justice and to uphold their beliefs. It is also interesting to see how the girls related to Sayeda Zainab as an exemplary female role model, a woman who stood up against her male oppressors to uphold her belief system and her responsibility to both her family and her religion:

Sayeda Zainab inspired me when she stood up to Yazid. I like that girl's power. She went through all this suffering; like, her grandpa, her mom died when she was little. Then she watched as her first brother got poisoned and then died, and then her beloved Imam Hussein's painful death. She also went through all the hardships after his death. (Rukaya, interview transcripts)

Sayida Zainab is very brave when she stood for her brother and after his killing she stood and spoke against those killers. I learn from Imam and Sayida Zainab to fight for freedom and not to be weak. (Noor, interview transcripts)

I also learn from Sayida Zainab to always have courage and always be helpful. I was inspired when she did not let Yazid kill Imam Zein Abedden. She was very strong and that reminds me that I am not by myself struggling. (Zeina, interview transcripts)

Sukayna connected the past to the present as she referred to “us” women and how Muslim women should follow Sayida Zainab’s example:

It is a big part when it comes to Sayeda Zainab, her mother, and her grandmother because they sacrificed a lot just for us and for Islam to stay around. I like how Sayida was strong with everything that had happened to her and how she had to take care of all the kids by herself. And she had no home and all the tents burned down. There is this story when she was sitting and staring at the sky and saying “yalyil” [oh night]. It taught me [that] us women should be stronger than we are right now. I am very shy and weak from the inside and I really feel different when I hear the story, and what happened made me feel that I should be stronger. We should not let just random guys put us down because we are wearing Hijab. We should be strong and stand up for ourselves. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

Sukayna felt empowered by women who overcame trauma or tragedy, such as Sayeda Zainab who stared to the sky and mourned her brother but continued to defend her religion and continued her supportive role in her brother’s mission. Sukayna refers in this quote to the way sincere faithful Muslims show pious reverence to God. With pious

reverence, sincere Muslims are deeply engaged in spiritual supplication through which they demonstrate total submission to and infinite love of God. Feeling weak and crying in this case indicates a deep and sincere submission to God, and Sayeda Zainab encapsulates such characteristics. Sukayna in this context views Sayeda as strong in terms of standing up for her family, her brother, and her religion while upholding such pious reverence. In this respect, being strong also corresponds to an inner peaceful state, and Sukayna thus acknowledges a paradigm that is highly recommended in Islam.

Similarly, the participants felt that Muslim women should stand up for themselves and not give up merely because of some bullies who pass judgment on their chosen attire. The participants focused on Sayeda Zainab's insistence to keep her Hijab throughout her hardships and to them this indicates the need to preserve the ritual and to wear the Hijab:

The way Sayeda Zainab responded to Yazid was powerful. The importance of how the women were wearing Abaya as they were tripping in the desert made you feel how the Hijab is important, because they were wearing the Hijab though they were tortured; you feel how it's important to wear it. (Batoul, interview transcripts)

When you think back, with what they were going through, how they burned down the tents and everything—all the tortures Sayeda Zainab went through. She kept the Hijab on. Over there, back then, it was hotter than now; no matter what she went through she kept the Hijab on, so she encourages us to take care of our headscarves. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

According to Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), “religious rituals are used by people to sacralize the social structure and bonds of the community and to ensure the

unconscious priority of communal identification” (as cited in Elbadri, 2009, p.53). With rituals, the emotional state plays important role on strengthening the feeling of belonging and belief. For instance, with the Shi’i ritual stories, the participants demonstrate that Shi’is remember that they should not forget the tragedy and, more importantly, that they should seek to better understand the tragedy and the meaning of self-sacrifice, female empowerment, caring about others, and standing up for one’s rights. With the themes of home and community, the participants confirm that “the battle of Karbala serves as a religious model for behaviour among Shia who are expected to struggle on the path to God, even if they face oppression and persecution from the non Shia rulers”(Elbadri, 2009, p. 3). All of the participants touched upon how the religious historical role models strengthen their understanding of their identities as Shi’i Muslim girls and motivate them to stand up for their beliefs and their religious practices, which includes wearing the Hijab. They referred to the principal Shi’i ideological concepts such as self-sacrifice, of struggling through pain in order to preserve their beliefs, and the exemplary female role models that strengthen their beliefs and provide them with a source of hope. For all the participants, the meaning of the Hijab has extended from being associated merely as a physical garment to one that represents deep religious concepts.

Transformational meaning of the Hijab. When the participants were asked about their understanding of the meaning of the Hijab, their responses indicated they perceived it as a transitional religious practice. They all found the initial experience of wearing the Hijab to be difficult, as they were not used to it and were the only ones in their respective schools who wore such garments. They also associated the Hijab with what they called the age of responsibility, in which they matured and became responsible

for not merely wearing the Hijab but also following other religious practices, such as praying and fasting. All of the participants touched upon the Shi'i belief that age 9 was a critical stage in which they had to become more mature and be responsible for their deeds and their religious practices as Muslims.

The participants believed that as 9-year old Muslim females, they had to submit to their God. To them, wearing the Hijab was a religious practice that must be observed in order to satisfy their God, one for which they would be rewarded in the Day of Judgment. They also related that as they grew up, they became aware of the deep meaning of the Hijab in terms of being close to God, and of managing their behaviour both towards themselves and others. In the next sections, I reiterate the main theme of the Hijab with the following subthemes: religious purposes; difficulty of initial experiences; birthday of responsibility (Takleef); and the transitional meaning of the Hijab.

Religious purposes. All the participants commented that the main reason for wearing the Hijab was religious—that is, a divine practice they felt compelled to observe. They believed that they gained good rewards from their God by submitting to His will regarding wearing the Hijab. Some of the younger participants used simple statements such as “part of my religion” and the older participants used the concept of “submitting to God” to describe their positions. But for all of the participants, following this practice meant more than merely obeying a rule, because as Muslims they had to trust their God and they wanted to follow what is right for their religion. In this respect, in a Muslim religious context, choice corresponds to getting a reward and to a concept of “submitting to God.” It is important to consider the religious discourse when examining the participants’ understanding of choice since they approach the concept of choice from

religious perspective, which is aligned with Hoodfar's (2003) belief that wearing the Hijab as "voluntary act" related to religious choice. Hoodfar critiqued Western feminists who failed to understand the religious meaning of choice and instead adopted a non-religious perspective in which wearing the Hijab is correlated with force and oppression.

The participants' comments presented below illustrate their positions:

- "It is not right to force someone to wear it. It is your choice in order to get hasanat [good rewards] and please God" (Rukaya, interview transcripts).
- "I will not get hasanat if I take off my Hijab. I want to go to paradise" (Maasuma, focus group transcripts).
- "I wear it because it is my religion. God told me to wear it" (Zahra, interview transcripts).
- "Since we are supposed to wear it, I thought it was important to me because God wants us to wear it. And then I got used to it, so it was not hard later" (Batoul, interview transcripts).
- "Hijab is a shield that is used for protection and not for fighting. God wants us to wear the Hijab and it is part of my religion" (Noor, interview transcripts).
- As a Muslim, and as in all religions, it is more with doing what is right. In Islam, it is more with wearing Hijab and how to wear it correctly" (Tabarak, interview transcripts).
- "It was hard to start the Hijab but because God says to do so, and I trust his decision, I decided to wear it" (Yasmeen, focus group transcripts).

Difficulty of initial experiences. Most of the participants indicated that their initial experiences wearing the Hijab at school were difficult. Being the only students

wearing the Hijab made them feel alienated from their peers. Most of them used words such as “uncomfortable,” “weird,” and “different” to express their initial experiences. However, they actually became more attached to the Hijab because of their religious commitment and the support they had from their mothers and the Muslim community:

I was shy and did not want to go inside the class, but my teacher encouraged me.

I was really scared in the beginning. But with the Takleef party that I had in the park, I felt very special and different and I also received many gifts. (Zahra, interview transcripts)

I remember it was summer; it was very hot, itchy and sweaty, and disgusting. It was kind of annoying. It was a kind of annoying when I wore it in grade 2 but then I got used to it and now like Hijab. Now I got used to it and I wear long stuff and feel more comfortable with wearing it. (Tabarak, interview transcripts)

It was a kind of different because I was wearing it on my first day. They asked questions. Sometimes people asked me really annoying questions that I do not want to answer, especially the new students in the class. It is hard when you are the only one wearing Hijab, though my sister was there too. My sister was not happy because she was the first and the only one. Now people got used to it and I am comfortable, and even my sister felt that she could talk more about it with me and she helped me and teaches me all the duties of prayer and fasting. (Zeina, interview transcripts)

I was worried about people who would judge me with my outfit. They asked me questions and since I was the only one I felt special. I was sweaty and

not comfortable, and different from others. I did think of taking it off but did not want to as I know there would be consequences, like God will not be happy. My mom went through this too and she took it off when she was 12 but later my older sister told her it would be weird if her daughters wore it and she does not; then my mom thought about it and decided to wear it. (Kawthar, interview transcripts)

In the beginning I felt weird and uncomfortable because it is like new to me. I haven't seen little girls wearing it at my age, so it was pretty not normal and then it became normal. (Yasmeen, interview transcripts)

Birthday of responsibility (Takleef). Both the Lebanese and the Iraqi groups indicated that the 9-year birthday was a big celebration with their friends and families that heralded their new responsibilities. This cultural celebration includes some religious rituals and is a public announcement that a girl is mature and responsible for all her religious practices and deeds. The girls explained how this party helped them to be more mature and understand the meaning of the Hijab:

- “Hijab protects me and my beauty. With Takleef, I became mature and care about my prayers, fasting, and Hijab” (Zahra, interview transcripts).
- “The Takleef party was very helpful and a big start because it is a kind of exciting to see people celebrating with you wearing Hijab, giving you presents, and it was fun” (Batoul, interview transcripts).
- “I was really excited to wear Hijab when I was little. I feel like I am growing up and being, like, a bigger girl. Hijab is what God wanted us Muslim women to wear to protect ourselves, to cover our body” (Sukayna, interview transcripts).

- “Takleef helps me to understand the meaning of Hijab. The party with my family and my friends made me happy. Especially the gifts” (Zeina, interview transcripts)
- “I had a Takleef party, which is like a birthday party for Hijab” (Kawthar, interview transcripts).
- “I was 8, wearing short skirt and sleeves [Mzantara]. That day I asked my friend’s mom to give me Hijab as all my friends wear Hijab. As I got it, I put it on and when I went home my mom was surprised but she accepted me. She made me a special party. Hijab party was very helpful” (Rukaya, interview transcripts).

Moreover, Noor demonstrated that having this party in the school helped her to be confident and happy. She also associates the Hijab with other practices such as fasting and praying:

The Hijab party is the best party. I had two parties; one in the school and one in the big hall. My mom asked the principal and the teacher to have it in the school in the beginning of the year. When my mom came to the class and started talking about the Hijab in the class, I was very happy and felt confident. Then we had the cake and the gifts that made everyone happy. I am lucky to have this party. I received many gifts and learned that I am responsible for all my deeds, like an adult. Hijab is also [associated] with fasting and praying, as I am now mukalafa and responsible for my actions. (Noor, interview transcripts)

Noor expressed the importance role of her mother on easing the initial experience of wearing the Hijab in the school. Noor also spoke about her mom’s regular visits of the school where she built good rapport with the administration and the teachers. Noor’s

situation provides an example of the possibility of accepting the values of others but at the same time the role of the mother of familiarizing the school with the cultural and religious differences. This corresponds to studies showing that minority students' identities and social experiences are shaped and influenced by the role of their parents who reinforce cultural and religious practice in the Muslim community (Mossalli, 2009; Shalabi, 2010; Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). For instance, Shalabi (2010) discusses the role of the mothers and how they reinforce their Muslim daughters' religious practices in the Muslim community in Canada. Mossalli (2009) also provides a deep analysis of the life of a successful and "typical" American female Muslim teen who is influenced by her mother's active role in the Muslim community and how this Muslim teenager adopts a similar approach to her mother's by actively supporting Muslim students both in her school (e.g., educating others about Islam, leading many activities in the school) as well as in the Muslim community. While parental involvement in Shalabi's and Mossalli's studies was addressed more in terms of the mothers' role in the Muslim community rather than in the schools, the current study shows that parental involvement in the school eased the young Muslim girls' initial experiences with wearing the Hijab. However, in the current research, there was another example where Noor expressed that her mother requested to include cultural activities in the school, but it was not considered due to the demography of the students where the principal mentioned that those kinds of activities were the responsibility of ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers and they did not have any ESL students in the school.

It is interesting to see that getting acceptance in the school requires strong communication skills from the parents and also the willingness from the school to listen

and act seriously on the needs of the students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Also, monocultural settings seem to influence individuals' willingness to accept others' values, as Rukaya and Kawthar shared that their cultural celebrations were not recognized after they moved to a monocultural setting. Such perspectives echo Shalabi and Taylor's (2011) study that elaborated on the need for future research in the elementary level as students in Shalabi and Taylor's study indicated they were not provided with accommodations for their religious practices in their elementary schools. The current research confirmed that in monocultural settings, Muslim females' experiences differed from those of others who attended diverse setting in terms of acknowledging their cultural values both in the school environment as well as in the curriculum (Rukaya interview).

Transitional meaning of the Hijab. The participants also appreciated both the practical as well as abstract aspects of the Hijab; that is, its use as a protective garment or covering, and its symbolic meaning associated with one's behaviour towards self and others. The participants also described that their understanding of the Hijab is developmental. They mentioned how wearing the Hijab became easier as they grew up due to their familiarity with it and their awareness of its meaning. For instance, Batoul stated explicitly how her understanding of the Hijab changed from being used for protection to controlling the self and others:

I feel it is a transition. Before, I used to say Hijab is a protection. Then after years, I realized you wear it as a protection from things that you cannot cross the line. There is a line of respect that you cannot cross. There is something you can say and something you can't [Batoul here explained the behavioral issues related

to wearing the Hijab. Muslim girls with Hijab need to respect and behave as mature persons]. The Hijab is not just [about] wearing the head part. It is necessary and people treat you differently because they know there is something different. I really feel safer with wearing the Hijab. You really feel there is a big need to wear it. (Batoul, interview transcripts)

Tabarak associates the developmental meaning of the Hijab with time, and feels that the more a Muslim girl understands and practices her religion, the more confident she becomes within herself. She remembered when she was 9 years old and how, over time and with her parents' support and teaching, she became more mature and stronger than before:

Maybe if you really understand and practice your religion, there is not really anything that should bother you. I remember the first day I wore my head job, no one really noticed especially. I used to wear it and take it off before turning 9, and I feel as you grow old you get used to it. There wouldn't be a problem. Gradually you learn about it and understand it. Parents can help you to remember your religion and this makes you stronger if you know you're doing the right thing; you won't be bothered by others who annoy you. (Focus meeting transcripts)

Similarly, Rukaya explained the deep meaning of the Hijab that she feels better able to understand as she grows up. She calls for more awareness of the Hijab's association with being closer to God and its relationship with other religious practices, rather than its mere use as a head-covering garment. Rukaya felt that it is important to learn the deeper meaning of the Hijab early on, and to not feel that one is being forced to wear it:

I was much younger and I did not understand the meaning of Hijab. At that time, I told my friends in grade 4 as much as I knew, and they accepted me and praised my nice clothes that I brought from Lebanon. Hijab is not something that you just copy others and wear it. Muslims should understand it. Hijab does not just mean covering our beauty—so we don't reveal our beauty. With the Hijab, we become closer to God, especially when we pray and fast. These are all musts for Muslims, and with wearing Hijab I make it official that I am doing the right thing. Hijab stands for religion. The first step you cover up, and then you work as Mukalafa [being responsible] by praying and fasting. (Rukaya, interview transcripts)

Even the younger participants explained how their feelings changed over time and how they gained a deeper understanding of the Hijab in terms of their behaviour and of caring about others:

In the beginning, I was scared. Then I learned from wearing Hijab to be patient and not wiggle and look around [behaving as a child]. Hijab is also [associated] with fasting and praying. With fasting, I learn how others are hungry and that we need to donate to help others. (Maasuma, interview transcripts)

Well, I am more used to it now actually. I like it much more now; it's pretty good now to wear the headscarf. It helps you with religion and if you don't wear it when you will be big you cannot call yourself a Muslim. And so some people wear the headscarf but with short sleeves because they are not used to it, and they do not understand it properly. There is one God [who will] start charging you and whatever you do is counted. That is when you start praying and fasting and wearing Hijab. (Yasmeen, interview transcripts)

When you wear Hijab you do not have to yell and you learn to lower your voice. Hijab later made me confident, as I feel more mature and disciplined.

(Kawthar, interview transcripts)

Some of the participants differentiated between the Sunni and Shi'i Muslim girls when they were explaining the meaning of the Hijab. They reflected on their awareness that Sunni Muslim girls do not wear the Hijab at an early age, and they perceived that Shi'i Muslim girls are more religious than the Sunni girls, based on their way of wearing the Hijab and also on their behavior (again, these assumptions may be attributed to the fact that the Shi'i Muslim girls begin wearing the Hijab earlier than the Sunni Muslim group):

Yes, usually Muslim Shi'i girls are more religious than Sunni. In schools they often listen to music and talk to boys and in general Sunni do not really wear the Hijab the correct way. I know not all Shi'i wear Hijab the correct way, but pretty much they wear long sleeves and not skinny jeans. (Tabarak, interview transcripts)

I am a Shi'i Muslim, which is different from Sunni because they do not believe in the 12 Imams, but we Shi'i do. We believe in the chain from the prophet, Imam Ali, till the last Imam. Shi'i Muslim girls are more religious than Sunni because they wear the Hijab more appropriately than the Sunni. (Rukaya, interview transcripts)

There is this girl who came in the middle of the year. She wore the Hijab but not in the correct way, and sometimes she took it off. She does not believe in the 12 Imams. When I told her that she has to wear it properly, she yelled at me. I

was happy to see her in the school but then I did not. She never talked to me and preferred to play with others. She is not like me. (Noor, interview transcripts)

In sum, all of the participants articulated the religious meaning of the Hijab in terms of protection, improving their behaviour, and how their understandings were transitional based on their age and maturity. This is similar to Hoodfar's (2003) and Zine's (2001) work that analysed the meaning of the Hijab from a religious perspective in terms of religious choice, self-identification, and modesty. The non-diverse environment of the school influenced the participants' initial experiences and created for them some tensions, but their religious commitments and the event of the Hijab party helped them to hold on to their beliefs. This corresponds with Chung (2011) and Eriksen (2010), who stress that children develop an understanding of themselves and their world through their interactions in and with multiple settings, including family, media, schools, and community. In the current research, the participants internalized what is valued by their Shi'i Muslim community and developed a multifaceted self-concept in which wearing the Hijab marked a life transition into mature adulthood whereby they learn to stand up for their beliefs.

Effects of visits “back home” on participants’ religious identities. Some of the participants referred to some traumatic experiences and stories that they heard during their visits to Iraq and Lebanon. Those traumatic situations influenced their understanding and awareness towards their religion. Some also mentioned the role of the religious shrines and how the visits “back home” made them stronger and more attached to their religion. Two further subthemes emerged that addressed the feelings of belonging, oppression, and faith.

Shi'i oppression of back home. Some of the participants connected their understanding of wearing the Hijab with their visit to their families' countries of origin. Tabarak spoke about her visit to Iraq and how she was inspired by her grandmother, whose husband—a religious Shi'i scholar—was executed by the Saddam Hussein regime. Tabarak was committed to her religion based on what she heard about her grandmother's method of raising her children in a way that showed respect and commitment to religion. She also referred globally to Bahrain as an example of a nation that oppresses Shi'i Muslims and that underscores her responsibility to preserve her religious identity:

I was in Iraq and saw my grandma and how she was very patient and a good Muslim. She raised up my mom and my aunts alone after the death of my grandpa who was killed by Saddam because of being a Shi'i. She used to hang my grandpa's jacket and always reminded her kids to bring the money from my grandpa's jacket as a reminder that their father never died and they should always remember his religious commitment. I know people there struggled a lot for their religion, as in Bahrain. I feel I am committed to be a good Shi'i Muslim and follow my grandma, and my grandpa. (Tabarak, interview transcripts)

On the other hand, Rukaya spoke about her traumatic experience while she was in Lebanon for a visit with her parents. Rukaya experienced the terror of war and decided to be religious by wearing the Hijab, as this religious practice gave her peace:

I came back from Lebanon after the war of July. I came back on a boat. We were planning to stay there forever. But it did not work because the war broke out. I was there when they pumped the airport. We used the boat to Greece. Then when we arrived to Canada we went to our cousins...[in a small city]. I always

remember the war. We were in an apartment and had a big field behind us and we saw the bombing. We were scared. We then ran to a hotel in Beirut and my dad tried to make us happy. We felt the ground was shaking. When my dad found out that they were taking people [by] ship to Greece, to Canada, we were grateful to be Canadians. I was so happy to stay with my cousins. I thought about the war and death and how I have to be close to God. Wearing the Hijab made me feel safe. (Rukaya, interview transcripts)

Effects of visits to shrines. Some participants referred to the Shi'i Muslim's way of visiting the shrines of the household of the prophet. Their visits to those shrines empowered them and made them committed to their belief. Tabarak, for example, referred to her visit to the Shrine of Imam Ali and Hussein and how this direct experience with others who shared the same belief strengthened her conviction that she was on the right path. This corresponds to Takim's (2009) work that paid significant attention to the impact of the religious shrines on Shi'i Muslims. While in Iraq, Tabarak did not have the feeling that she was different from others and no one annoyed her about her religious practices:

When you are there you feel you are doing right because you are closer to Imams. Sometimes, people, they are doing the wrong thing, but you got the impression they tend to do the right thing because they go to the shrine. Then it's a good thing, especially in Ashura where everybody is into it. When you are there you feel you are doing the right thing and no one bothers you. (Focus group transcripts)

Batoul also confirmed that visiting the shrines of the Imams was very helpful in strengthening her religious belief: “I think the best part by going to your country that you can have is that in Iraq you have the Imams and this is the most influenced part” (Batoul, focus group transcripts). She also praised people back in Iraq for their ability to undertake certain religious practices such as fasting in hot weather, and using religious terms such as “ajar” (reward) and “jihad” (in the sense of “fighting the self”) as a means to explain the idea of receiving a reward that has different levels based on the difficulty of the religious practice. For example, Batoul elaborated how people in Iraq should get more rewards for fasting and wearing the Hijab than those in Canada because they experienced more difficulty due to the hot weather: “When it’s summer there and it’s very hot you feel you get ajar and you are doing jihad in terms of fasting and wearing headscarves in this hot weather; it’s like you feel you are accomplishing something bigger than fasting over here” (Batoul, focus group transcripts). Sukayna also compared her feelings of being in Iraq with those of being in Canada. She elaborates on how she was not a minority and that she felt comfortable and normal; with so many people sharing the same religion, she found support: “You feel normal there because everyone is like you. Here you’re the only one; there I feel more support because all my aunts wear [the Hijab]. There you feel more comfortable; here you feel awkward” (Sukayna, focus group transcripts).

In sum, the participants reiterate the importance of their religious spirituality that encompassed the Shi’i ritual stories which call for moral and human values. The girls also acknowledge the role of the Muslim community and their mothers in reinforcing their Shi’i faith and providing them with a space where they feel a sense of belonging. Further, the meaning of the Hijab was not merely related to garments but also connected

to those religious values that unite the participants' identities in harmony as a whole entity (mind, body, and soul).

The current research supports other research on Muslim students regarding the strength of the community, the power of religion in enhancing self-identification, and the Muslim females' agreement that the meaning of the Hijab corresponds to religious choice and asserts their religious identity (Hoodfar, 2003; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Shalabi, 2010; Zine, 2001). In terms of gender analysis, the participants in the current research viewed themselves as girls who are submitted to their God and enhanced by the role of Sayeda Zaynab, so their role as females is associated with the Shi'i understanding of females as active agents who participate actively in the society and have the responsibility of educating others about their beliefs. In terms of the religious choice to wear the Hijab, the girls viewed their gender from a religious perspective and did not see the Hijab as a means of oppression; instead, they referred to the term *mukalafa* (responsible) and how they gained confidence and maturity as they have to behave as mature girls rather than being child. The way the girls perceived themselves with wearing the Hijab is similar to Hoodfar's (2003) and Zine's (2001) analyses in which the participants viewed their gender issues from a religious perspective (e.g., religious choice, submission to God, maturity, and responsibility).

School

All the themes that were related to the social world of the girl's notion of home reinforced the differences of the values between the dominant group and their minority ones. Most importantly, the participants articulated their interaction and their isolation of their values from the values of the dominant ones. The themes that addressed their

responses were as follows: (a) “us versus them” mentality; (b) religious and complex secular dialogues; (c) absence of Muslim representations in monocultural schools; (d) discrimination; (e) remaining silent versus speaking out; and (f) participants’ recommendations for preserving their identities.

“Us versus them” mentality. This theme is related to the language used by the participants when referring to themselves during the interview and the focus meetings. I noticed the participants’ use of plural forms frequently as part of the collectivist religious tone that indicates group consensus and an adherence to a concept of others over the self. They also used the word “us” as a way of identifying themselves as different from others in terms of their backgrounds. For instance, Sukayna used “us” a lot when she described the Muslim girls’ need to hold on to their beliefs and she used “them” when she referred to the bullies:

Girls can stand by themselves and it is not right when people think that girls are weak. I think us Muslim girls can go and explain straight why we are wearing it. And then we will be comfortable with Hijab. If they did not like Hijab then Muslim girls should just ignore them. Try to avoid them because they can pull off your Hijab or be a bully. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

In this quotation, Sukayna refers to an individualistic strategy of ignoring the bully, though the Hijab is related to a collective practice. This may reflect on the nature of the environment on the individual responses to others. Sukayna uses such an individualized strategy as she was the only Muslim in the school. It is also interesting to see that Sukayna refuses the gendered stereotypes that girls are weak and instead prefers active action that educates others about the meaning of the Hijab.

When Kawthar tried to provide a reason for the discrimination that she thinks is caused by religious differences, she used “us” as an indicator of seeing herself and others as being different and apart from the intolerant segment of the dominant culture: “I do not think Canadians do not like us as Muslims. But if some do [feel that way], then it is because of their relatives who don’t like Muslims. Most people I know care about my personality more than my religion” (Kawthar, interview transcripts).

In general the plural language that was used interchangeably among the participants is one way of expressing their religious belonging to a certain group, in this case Shi’i Muslim females. This also resonates with the research on Muslim students in which the participants used such plural language as a means to reinforce how they were perceived as others and faced social exclusion (Sensoy & Stonebancks, 2009).

Religious and complex secular dialogues. Most of the participants identified themselves as being different than others in their schools, and were aware of both the absence of religious dialogues and the dominance of secular beliefs among the students in their schools. For instance, Kawthar explicitly stated how this absence creates for her a feeling of annoyance and geared her to be closer to her God. However, she insists on the need to talk about the similarities between Islam and Christianity:

Some people do not believe in God and this makes me more attached to God.

When I hear them saying there is no God, I feel uncomfortable. I tried to encourage them to believe in God. I refer to Christmas and Jesus in order to teach them about the importance of religion and being good. (Kawthar, interview transcripts)

Noor too explained how she used to give reasons for the existence of God, and commented on how many of the students are not familiar with Jesus. Consequently, she speaks to them about the story of Jesus in order to make them respect religion:

I always speak to those who do not believe in God about the unity of creatures and the beauty of nature and how this cannot be created without a creator. They do not believe and they do not know even the story of Jesus. I need to tell them about Jesus so they know their prophet, and how we respect Jesus. I feel sad that they do not believe in God. (Noor, interview transcripts)

Rukaya mentioned that many students use the term “mother nature” and stated that religion is an important part of her life: “They used to say mother nature created the world; religion is missed in schools. But why? Religion is realistic. We all need to be closer to God and we make dua [supplication]” (Rukaya, interview transcripts).

Conversely, Tabarak tries to adopt a more conciliatory approach through religious dialogue and by pointing out the common aspects in religious denominations in order to show how Muslims are not so different than others. She referred to her friends who are Christians and how she talks to them about the sacrifice of Imam Hussein and the stories of Jesus and Ibrahim. She also referred to Shi’i ideology regarding the saviour represented by the 12th and last Imam (i.e., Muhammad Al-Mahdi, otherwise known as Mahdi), whom Jesus will join at some point in the future to fulfill their mission of bringing justice and peace to the world, and indicated that her friends shared similar stories about Jesus and his mission. Tabarak mentioned how those dialogues connected Muslims to other faiths:

I have Christian and Muslim friends. I only have a few Christian friends. They sometimes ask me about Islam and I tell them about Imam Hussein, and then they told me about some people in their religion, like Jesus. I told [a friend] that Jesus will come to them at the end of the world. I told her that Imam Mahdi will come with Jesus and save the world from injustice and evil. They have many stories similar to us, like prophet Ibrahim. Sharing these stories makes us closer to them. They can relate to us and do not feel they are different than us. (Tabarak, focus group transcripts)

In general, although the participants were aware of the absence of religion in their schools, they recognized the importance of talking about God and of sharing stories that are similar across Islam and Christianity in order to connect with non-Muslim students. Such dialogues helped the participants to share their faith and strengthen their relationship with others.

Absence of Muslim representations in monocultural schools. All the participants were aware of the non-diverse environment of their schools and its impact on their relationship with others. They were conscious of the differences between diverse and non-diverse schools, particularly in terms of the challenges associated with being singled out as an “other” because of the schools’ limited resources and teachers’ limited knowledge of Muslim culture.

Batoul talked about the frustration she felt in grade 4 because of students who were not familiar with her attire: “I was not happy in grade 4. I was mad because I did not understand why others had to treat me differently. I really don’t think they need to do that” (Batoul, interview transcripts). Maasuma elaborated on the students’ unfamiliarity

with such attire, and she wished there could be more (or at least some) representations in the curriculum of Muslim girls wearing the Hijab. She also hoped that teachers might augment their knowledge about her culture instead of basing their pedagogy solely on resources derived from the dominant culture:

I want to see more girls wearing Hijab so people will not ask about it. I would also be interested to read book about us in the school. I would like to be with a teacher who knows about my culture, as my teacher always speaks about English people. (Maasuma, focus group transcripts)

Consequently, I have categorized the participants' observations on the absence of Muslim representations in their schools into the following subthemes: Acknowledging celebrations; teachers' limited knowledge; and activities.

Acknowledging celebrations. Kawthar and Rukaya spoke about their school's failure to acknowledge minority groups' celebrations due to the demography of its students: "There is only me and my sister, so the school does not really acknowledge our religious celebrations" (Rukaya, interview transcripts). This corresponds with Shalabi's study (2010), whose participants addressed the absence of religious accommodation in elementary schools. Kawthar also underscored the differences between schools in terms of student diversity:

There is no announcement in my school about any celebrations for Muslims. If there were more [Muslim] students, I am sure there would be announcements. In another school, my sister was bullied but when she moved to another school that was diverse she was happy. Schools are different. (Kawthar, interview transcripts)

Sukayna shared her experience of being in two different schools. The first school was diverse, so she noticed the acknowledgement of diversity in the announcements corresponding to celebrations and holidays, as well as in the library's book selections. In her subsequent school, however, the school focused only on cultural holidays such as Easter and Christmas. She thus appreciates her former school for its respect to diversity:

In my old school I thought there would not be any books about other religions in the library because most of the people are Christians. I think they [included] these books because there are more Muslims and they want others to learn about other religions. They even made announcements for Eid and other religions. I really felt special in the old school, as in my other school ... they did not make any announcements and just focused on Easter. At that time I was little and did not care about it. But now I really appreciate the school that made the announcements because people there cared about us. (Sukayna, focus group transcripts)

Sukayna also referred to the demography of the students as the main reason for respecting diversity. She believes that non-diverse schools do not pay enough attention to the minority students:

My old school really respects every religion. I believe that schools with few Muslims do not make announcements. They may respect us, but do not care that much. If there are many Muslims they will care and respect us. If there is only one Muslim student, nobody will care about learning about Islam. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

Teachers' limited knowledge. All of the participants believe that their teachers do not have adequate knowledge to talk about other cultures, including Muslims. Batoul

believed that her school does not celebrate important Muslim holidays because of teachers' limited knowledge and their inability to distinguish between Islamic religious or cultural events (e.g., in Canada, this could be likened to the distinction between Good Friday and Victoria Day), and she commented on teachers' tendency to speak of the culture instead of religion, as it is less controversial to talk about the former. To her, issues related to religion are very sensitive and it is better to stay away from religious discussions in order to avoid any misrepresentation:

I think schools focus more on culture than religion. I guess it is easier to figure things out in a culture than in a religion. I think they'd rather concentrate on culture because in religion they may get some wrong details and they may put in students' minds different ideas. Our school does not celebrate cultural days. I am ok if we don't because sometimes teachers get things wrong. I feel, "why should the school do something they do not know about?" (Batoul, focus group transcripts)

Noor suggested a reason why her school does not celebrate Muslim cultural days. She noted that her mother had asked about a particular celebration, and had been told that it was English as a Second language teacher's responsibility, though unfortunately there was not English as a Second language teacher available to look after the event. Noor associated the acknowledgement of this day with the demography of the students. To her, Cultural Day is limited to English as Second language students. It is also interesting how she equated Whiteness with English, and this may be due to the monocultural setting where the majority of the students who are White speak English, so she thinks that speaking other languages is associated with race: "We don't have cultural activities; my

mom asked for them but they said the English as a Second language teacher was responsible for this, and we do not have English as a Second language people in the school. All the students are White” (Noor, interview transcripts).

In another context, Zeina complained about a teacher who once had asked that she remove her Hijab. She mentioned how the teacher should have been sensitive to other people’s beliefs: “When I was in grade 2, I used to wear the Hijab to support my sister, who was the only one in the school [to wear the Hijab]. When a boy behind me kept on touching it, the teacher asked me to take it off, so I did. The teacher should know about other religions. I felt embarrassed” (Zeina, interview transcripts).

Batoul also shared her experience involving a Social Studies teacher and how she was frustrated when the teacher was not sensitive about historical events and associated Islam with oppression. She also referred to the differences in teachers’ understanding and beliefs towards other religions:

In history, the teacher was talking about how they [settlers] really started with the land and used the religion. She said the French wanted to convert the native to Christianity, similar to how Muslims did in some countries. She did not speak about people in Muslim countries trying to have freedom, as in Egypt and Bahrain. I think the other teacher in grade 5 would acknowledge Muslims, but not this teacher. (Batoul, interview transcripts)

Rukaya, similar to Batoul, argued that her teacher did not have adequate knowledge about Islam when she spoke about Muslim women in Afghanistan, and was not sensitive enough to avoid using stereotypes associated with Muslim women. Rukaya

found herself responsible for standing up for her religion and clarifying that Muslim women have different experiences based on their culture and ethnicity:

Once our teacher talked about women in Afghanistan and the law and how men have full custody and can beat women. I watched a movie about it. I felt bad. I told them Muslims are not like this movie. The images of Muslim women depend on the country; like in Lebanon and Iraq, women are normal and not oppressed like in Afghanistan. The teacher just stuck to her own work and did not talk about Islam and different cultures within Islam. (Rukaya, interview transcripts)

Batoul stated explicitly that she has to clarify issues about Islam because the teachers do not have enough knowledge: “Teachers need to learn about other cultures so they can teach students about other religions and culture. Our teacher does not have the knowledge about Islam. I feel we have to clarify things” (Batoul, focus group transcripts). Both Zeina and Yasmeen talked about the absence of the representation of Muslim in the grade 4 Social Studies class. They talked about how the focus was on the so-called Dark Ages as opposed to what Muslim’s view as the Islamic Golden Age. As Zeina noted, “I learned about Dark Ages and medieval time. I just discovered that at that time there was also a Golden Age and I wish if our teacher would have talked about Muslim inventions but she did not” (Zeina, interview transcripts). Similarly, Yasmeen had learned about Muslim scientific and technological developments from her mother, and she hoped to tell others about those great achievements: “When my mom told me about the Golden Age, I was very proud, and I wish I could tell English people that Muslims are smart. We never learned this in the school” (Yasmeen, interview transcripts). Zeina and Yasmeen

addressed important point related to hidden curriculum where the focus is more geared to the values and the culture of the dominant group (Egbo, 2009).

Activities. The participants also talked about the challenges associated with their inability to participate in certain school activities, and how such exclusion makes them feel awkward. For instance, Zeina talked about the “crazy hair day” and other activities in which she was left out; she wished her teachers could devise activities in which even Muslim girls wearing the Hijab could be involved: “Maybe they can make another trip for people who cannot participate on trips such as the waterslide one. There are some days such as the crazy hair day that do not work for us. These activities make us feel left out” (Zeina, focus group transcripts). Zeina further suggested that teachers should consider cultural activities more carefully even if students appear to look the same: “I want to see more cultural events in our school. People may look the same but they are coming from different backgrounds” (Zeina, interview transcripts).

Sukayna expressed how she felt awkward because of her outfit: “I feel like there’s something you can’t participate in and because you’re wearing a Hijab ... that makes you feel left out and awkward sometimes” (Sukayna, focus group transcripts). Tabarak added to Sukayna’s observation by referring to school trips that excluded them because of their inability to participate in physical activities such as swimming: “I feel when [Sukayna] said to feel awkward and left out, maybe there is something you can do because of the Hijab. There are some trips you cannot participate in, like wild water, and you can’t participate because you have to wear swimming suits and stuff like that, so maybe that’s what she meant” (Tabarak, focus group transcripts).

It is also important to mention that the participants described how participating in the schools' activities, whether in sport or other social events, was very important for them as they did not participate in any such activities outside the school, except perhaps excursions to the library or activities sanctioned by the Islamic centre (such as camping or sleepovers). Only Noor talked about being involved in extracurricular activities such as karate, art classes, and swimming lessons, all of which involved one-on-one lessons. Rukaya also felt that parents should involve their daughters in more activities so they would not feel left out both in and out of school: "I wish our parents did not leave us out. We really need alternatives for what we missed in the school and outside the school" (Rukaya, interview transcripts).

In sum, Chung (2011) and Phelan et al. (1998) refer to minority children's identity that is related to the shared characteristics (such as language, ethnicity, and religion) of their cultural group that are different from the dominant group. If those differences are not appreciated by the dominant group, then various forms of racial, religious, and gender discrimination may occur in and outside their schools (Akhtar, 2007; Kincheloe, 2008). Specifically, the current study relates to the research done on Muslim students (Abo-Zena et al., 2009; Imam, 2009; Khan, 2009) in terms of the tensions and the misunderstanding Muslims may face both in and outside their schools due to the cultural and religious differences. For instance, Abo-Zena et al. (2009) demonstrate how the four female Muslim participants in their study experienced exclusion and religious discrimination due to the lack of education about Islam and to the negative stereotypes of Muslim women. Also, Imam (2009) refers to some of the formal and informal curricula of schools in the United States whereby Muslim students are expected to participate in activities of other

faiths (such as Christianity), thus creating a feeling of alienation. In the current research, the participants negotiated those differences and felt there is a need for a greater and more accurate representation of the Muslim experience throughout the school system, and for teachers to be better educated regarding religious and cultural differences in order for students from different backgrounds to be fully included in curricular and extracurricular activities.

Discrimination. This theme encompasses the participants' negative experiences with respect to discrimination. They discussed various features of discrimination, including stereotypes and negative images; dislike and not favoured; bullying; "weird looks"; and racial jokes.

Stereotypes and negative images. Many of the participants were aware of the negative images associated with Muslim women. The negative images of Muslim women corresponded to terrorism, violence, backwardness, and oppression. Tabarak discussed stereotypes by providing different examples to other religions, such as the stereotypes associated with Jewish people: "There are stereotypes for certain groups such as Jews, Muslims—all Muslims are violent or all Jews are cheap. There are stereotypes about different religions and those students use these views against people" (Tabarak, focus group transcripts). Tabarak also referred to misconceptions related to Muslim women in terms of being oppressed and illiterate: "They think Muslim girls are forced to wear the Hijab, are beaten to death, or are slaves or have no right to education and that they are oppressed. This is not true and they are stereotypes" (Tabarak, interview transcripts). This is similar to Rezai-Rashti (1994, 1999) who addressed the challenges associated with religious, racialized and gendered discrimination that face Muslim female students

and how those discriminatory actions are related to persistently negative images of Muslim women and veiling.

Batoul and Zeina also referred to stereotypes; Zeina talked about her sister's experience with being called a terrorist by one of her classmates, and how her sister was upset because the teacher did not take any action:

Some think Muslims are like Bin Laden or terrorists. I heard from my sister that once in her class, there was a boy who said all Muslims are terrorists. It was really weird when the teacher did not do anything. The people around them denied it.

My sister felt bad and she decided not to tell. (Zeina, interview transcripts)

To Rukaya and Sukayna, some books and the media contribute to the negative images of Muslim women, and they feel there is a need to educate and explain to their friends about their religion. This corresponds to previous research that examined the media representation of Muslims (Al-Fartousi & Mogadime, 2012; Mogadime, Ramrattan Smith, & Scott, 2008) in terms of associating Muslim youth with negative images, terrorism, and backwardness. Such work includes Sensoy's (2009) attempt to examine the mainstream discourses corresponding to "textbook Muslim" narratives, which portray Muslims as inactive and primitive as opposed to the Western progressive lifestyle. Sensoy calls for the need to be aware of the knowledge internalized from such "textbook Muslim" discourses.

Disliked and not favoured. Most of the participants explained how being different influences their teachers' interaction with them. Zeina explained how teachers do not favour Muslim girls and she calls for equal treatment:

I would like to see [that a] different person has not to be treated in a different way. Sometimes teachers show it. They would not call on you as much as other people in all subjects. Teachers should try to make everybody feel the same whatever they wear, and how they wear it. (Zeina, interview transcripts)

Batoul also felt that favouritism among teachers suggests that Muslim girls who wear the Hijab are not knowledgeable. She asks merely to be treated as a human being:

There are some teachers who favour some children more than others. People think women with Hijab do not know anything. They are just left behind. I feel this is not cool, because I do not know why they do not see us as humans. I mean, we are still humans; we should not be treated that way. (Batoul, focus group transcripts)

Rukaya, Zahra, and Kawthar shared the same feelings and wished that teachers would not treat them differently, except when there is a need to do so: “Sometimes, teachers may make you feel you are different as a Muslim. But they should make you feel the same as others. I need to be treated differently sometimes, but not all the time” (Kawthar, interview transcripts).

Bullying. It is interesting to note that bullying is the term that Muslim research refers to most often when touching upon religious and racialized gendered discrimination. (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009). This is due of the fact that schools act more decisively when the discriminatory action is labeled and falls under the bullying act. Even the participants in the current research referred to this term when they were talking about the religious, racialized and gendered discrimination and how the school responded to those actions by referring to this term. All of the participants included bullying as part of their negative experiences in school. They referred to physical as well verbal instances of

bullying. For example, they all perceived their peers' frequent questioning as a challenge and noted that it makes them feel different. Many of the participants mentioned how they often were teased by their friends who ask them why they cannot remove their Hijabs. Noor used to respond to her friends and even agree with some of them in order to avoid the pressure of the questioning: "They know Hijab is part of my religion but they keep on asking me to take it off, and [telling me] that I will be prettier. I am tired of their questions and just say yes; but inside me, I do not agree" (Noor, interview transcripts). Noor also shared a story of a boy who made fun of her skin colour and her food:

One day in the recess, a boy told me, "What ugly black feet!" I felt sad and shy; I didn't wear my slippers again. Then, sometimes they made fun of my food. I told my mom not to pack me our food, but she told me to be proud of myself and my culture. When they did the same thing, I hid my food and ate under the desk.

When I told my mom about it, she went the next day to the school and talked to my teacher who brought us a story about an Italian boy who had special spaghetti and how his friends made fun of him, but once they tasted it they found it delicious. My teacher speaks about respecting others. (Noor, interview transcripts)

Similarly, Maasuma, Zahra, Rukaya, and Kawthar expressed a feeling of being tired of all the questions and their decision to ignore those questions. On the other hand, Sukayna faced physical bullying and shared her experience when a student kept on teasing her during the "crazy hair day" and asked her to take her Hijab off. She ignored him, but then he tried to pull her Hijab off after school:

It was a "crazy hair day" and there was this student who kept asking about my hair. Then after the school he stopped me and took my skipping rope. I asked him

to give it back and then I grabbed it. He ran after me and pulled my back pack. I started to cry and asked him to let me go home. He said he would pull my Hijab off. Then I ran home. The next day I told my teacher and she dealt with it [the student was suspended and a police officer came and talked about bullying].

(Sukayna, focus group transcripts)

Batoul also talked about her experience on “crazy hair day” when a supply teacher asked her to take off her Hijab due to a complaint she heard from a boy who refused to take off his hood because of Batoul who also wore the Hijab. Batoul was embarrassed and told the teacher that she could not because it is part of her religion. The teacher did not even apologize and ignored the incident. Both Sukayna’s and Batoul’s stories demonstrated how teachers responded differently based on the kind of the discrimination (e.g., Physical or verbal).

“Weird looks.” Some of the participants talked about the weird looks they received from people. Batoul explained how she felt sad when she noticed how some people gave her mom a dirty look: “I remember when my mom was driving the car and a guy gave my mom a dirty look. I really do not think that was reasonable” (Batoul, focus group transcripts). Zahra and Kawthar talked about their experiences with this kind of look whenever they went swimming, as their swimsuits covered their bodies and head. Rukaya mentioned that she got used to this kind of look and how she would even look back at those persons staring at her. Tabarak also shared a story of a Muslim girl in her class who was extremely upset by this kind of discrimination; in this case, the girl had locked herself in the washroom because of the “disgusting looks” that some of the other girls had given her during a school “pizza day.” Tabarak had gone to the washroom to

help calm the girl down: “This often happened to us, where they look at us in a weird way; she might be sensitive because of how people usually look at her” (Tabarak, focus group transcripts). This corresponds with research on Muslims in which the participants expressed their worries about the weird looks they received from the dominant group (Hoodfar, 2003), thus confirming the negative images associated with Muslim females with the Hijab (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008).

Racial jokes. I noticed that only the 12-year old participants referred to the topic of racial jokes when talking about how others interacted with them and this relates to research on other 12-year old Muslim students when addressing racial jokes (Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009). Sukayna felt that certain comments should not necessarily be perceived as racially motivated if they were said in good humour:

Sometimes my friends say “terrorist” just as a joke. I do not think it is racial unless they mean it. If my friends are serious, I have to stand up for myself and say I am not a terrorist, that the stuff you see in the media are not true. (Sukayna, focus group transcripts)

Both Batoul and Tabarak talked about the racial jokes as a way to stereotype others.

Tabarak interprets this kind of joke as an underlying comment on how people really feel about others, and that what really matters is the way people speak to her. To her, people should act and speak nicely to each other, as part of a greater humanity:

Some jokes are really not jokes but they are comments. If you are asking them a question, they just act towards you, like, lower. ... Sometimes it is the tone in their voice. They are wrong, because you are human; we are all the same species and should be treated the same too. (Tabarak, focus group transcripts)

In sum, all of the participants touched on some of the discrimination they experienced in their schools. They were aware that their identities as Muslims who wear the Hijab influenced how others interacted with them. They were unhappy with the discrimination against their religion and instead argued for the underlying humanity at the core for human relationships. As Sukayna stated, “Respect us is what we ask. We respect others even if they do not respect us” (Sukayna, focus group transcripts).

Remaining silent versus speaking out. All of the participants preferred to stay silent when facing any kind of discrimination. They claimed they did not want to add to their differences and attract the attention of others, or being called tattletales: “My sister is scared of being a tattletale. I would feel weird, and the person who said ‘terrorist’ would be in trouble; I would be the cause of trouble” (Zeina, interview transcripts). The participants explained how they were already perceived as weird and awkward, and judged because of their clothing: “People will start judging them if they had problems, if they had something unusual. People would judge them as if they were weird, so it’s better to stay silent” (Sukayna, interview transcripts). Batoul also believes that teachers are not aware of their struggle. It is also interesting how Batoul referred to the behaviours that are expected from girls (e.g., being quiet) and how she connected such behaviours to religious differences:

Most of the time I let it pass. I stay silent because I do not want to make problems in the school. I think in many cases teachers did not realize our struggles. Girls don’t want attention and are already different and people ask about why you are wearing it, so I don’t think they want so much attention, and because I’ve caused problems they don’t want to make it bigger. (Batoul, interview transcripts)

Batoul's response shows how girls may sometimes respond passively to racialized, gendered discrimination especially if there is just one girl in a monocultural setting. This also corresponds to Rezai-Rashti's work (1999) that addresses the racialized gendered discrimination that Muslim girls faced in school and how it is connected to the colonizer discourse that viewed Muslim females and the veil in relation to oppression. Some participants even shared their experiences with speaking out about their struggles to others. Noor, for instance, discussed an incident that occurred in grade 2 in which she approached a teacher and talked to her about a student who had directed a racial slur at her. She was very confused, as the teacher did not believe her and in fact blamed her for creating unrest in the class. Noor spoke to her mother about the incident; her mother then went to the school and talked to the teacher, at which point the school took action to resolve the matter. Noor believed that teachers do not trust young girls like her, and will not take action unless asked to do so by adults. This is also another example of racialized gendered discrimination where the ethnocentric attitude of the teacher appeared to cause her to ignore Noor's problem (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008). Noor related how a counsellor was invited to speak to her class about respect and bullying after the latter incident:

It will be worse if you tell the teacher. Last time, a girl told me "move your stinky Arabic skin," so I was embarrassed and directly spoke to the teacher, who did not believe me and blamed me. I don't like to tell my teachers; my mom always stands up for me. Then I told my mom. She knows the school and the principal very well. She talked to the teacher and the principal and asked the girl, who said she did say those words. The principal called both of us to the office and said that

this is not acceptable; I told them that people are different ... and we have to respect each other; like even if I'm not Christian, I respect English Christian people and races and they should respect me. Then, I have a counsellor who always meets with me and says nice things about myself and religion. She even came to the class and talked about differences and respect. (Noor, interview transcripts)

Yasmeen also shared a story of a bully who kept on teasing her and made fun of her food. Yasmeen tried to be silent and worked hard on building a good rapport with others. Yasmeen's response is similar to Batoul's reaction to stay silent for being the only Muslim in the school. This also resonates with what Bosacki (2005a) referred to as "political silence" whereby the minority students prefer to stay silent as they feel so alone and, being aware of the stereotypes associated with their race or religion, instead find peace in their Muslim community where there are other kids who share similar values. Yasmeen also connects with a general, gendered norm that requires girls to be quiet, and this may be due to the cultural norms that encourage girls to stay calm and be polite. In this respect, the intersectionality of gender, culture, and race are related to Yasmeen's experience with respect to racialized gendered discrimination (Hoodfar, 2003). Yasmeen also talked about she tried to stay away from a particular girl from the same culture in order to avoid any kind of exclusion. But then she could not tolerate the discrimination and spoke to her mother, who then insisted that Yasmeen should inform the teacher. Yasmeen was hesitant to approach the teacher directly:

Girls prefer to stay silent when they are annoyed by others and always try to be cool, and I want to be with my friends. Once there was a boy who made fun of my

food. I started thinking about our food, and another one told my friends that play with me that I'm disgusting. I felt upset and told my mom, who told me to tell the teacher if he did this again, and that some kids do not know about us. He did this again and I told the teacher and the teacher spoke to him that this is not acceptable and if he did this again he would be suspended. I always stuck with Canadians so they do not think I am disgusting. I avoid talking to one new girl like me, because if I speak to her they want play with me and [the others] will think I am dumb.

(Yasmeen, interview transcripts)

Although the participants preferred silence over telling, they insisted that it is important to tell the teacher if an aggressor kept on hurting them. However, they have different ways of approaching the teacher. Sukayna preferred to talk only to the teacher who cared: "I think it is important to tell ... an adult you trust, somebody who deals and cares about you. You should not tell teachers who don't care; you should tell the teacher who cares" (Sukayna, focus group transcripts). Batoul, on the other hand, preferred to tell another student instead of approaching the teacher directly: "If they keep doing it, it's important to tell. It's like, I think if someone did it twice, then it's better to tell someone else who will tell the teacher" (Batoul, focus group transcripts).

Participants' recommendations for preserving their identities. The participants throughout the interviews and the focus meetings provided some strategies and suggestions that may accommodate their needs and help preserve their identities as Shi'i Muslim females who wear the Hijab. Some of the recommendations address the role of religious commitment in relation to age; the role of Muslim community and of

mothers; familiarity with wearing the Hijab; educating others about religion; and equity, moral values, and the expression of human rights. These subthemes are outlined below.

Role of religious commitment in relation to age. All of the participants acknowledged the important role of religion and the relevance of their ages in negotiating their identities as Muslims. Tabarak believed that age is an important factor in determining what counts as a challenge for Muslim girls who wear the Hijab. To her, middle school will be the critical time when Muslim girls will face more problems:

I was wearing my Hijab in grade 3 and no one really noticed it, but if you start wearing it in grade 5, 7, or 8, that's when the kids start making problems. So when you wear it at age 9 and at a younger age, there wouldn't be a problem, and if there is you can talk to your mom and your mom can talk to the principal or maybe the teacher; they can talk about it and they can create consequences.

(Tabarak, focus group transcripts)

Batoul agreed with Tabarak and mentioned how middle school is very difficult, as it is a transitional age and, with their religious commitment, Muslim girls can experience problems:

The hardest part probably is the middle school, because it is the time where boys and girls think it's the right time and they can start now, and as long as you know that you are very close to God and you understand your religion, then it won't be hard because you know why you are wearing the Hijab and nothing really can break you. (Batoul, focus group transcripts)

Familiarity with wearing the Hijab. Some of the participants talked about familiarity and time as important factors that ease the process of interacting with non-

Muslim students with regards to wearing the Hijab. Batoul commented how it was easier for Sukayna's sister to wear the Hijab because Sukayna had already done so, and thus the students had become familiar with the Hijab: "Her sister [set] the path for her. ...

Everyone in the school has seen someone before wearing a Hijab, so they have gotten used to it, so I don't think it will be hard for her" (Batoul, focus group transcripts).

Teachers as advocates for others. This subtheme is related mainly to the experience of Sukayna and her sister with the same teacher who advocated for both of them in their initial experiences with wearing the Hijab at school. Sukayna commented on her teacher's care and concern about her, and how she realized that teachers are different regarding how they care about their students:

My teacher cares for me and if there was something wrong he would come and ask me what's wrong. I think it is important to tell somebody in the adult world; you trust somebody who deals and cares about you. You should not tell teachers who don't care; you should tell the teacher who cares. (Sukayna, focus group transcripts)

Kawthar talked about her teachers' role in acknowledging their religion during the classroom: "Some teachers acknowledge Eid and love the way I wear my Hijab" (Kawthar, interview transcripts). Zahra praised her teacher for giving her the opportunity to stand in the classroom and talked about her religion and her Hijab when she started wearing her Hijab in grade 3: "I did a speech in grade 4 about my Hijab and Islam. It is very helpful to let us speak about our religion" (Zahra, interview transcripts).

Most of the participants also acknowledged the teachers' role in stopping the bullying and racial discrimination: "Teachers stop those who are racists and explain

racism very well” (Rukaya, interview transcripts). Zeina agreed about the teachers’ advocacy role in stopping racism: “The teacher always reminds us that bullying is not a good habit and whoever gets doing it would be in a big trouble” (Zeina, interview transcripts). Sukayna shared a very powerful story in which her teachers stood up for her and stopped the bullying. The same teacher was an advocate for her older sister and even encouraged her sister to wear the Hijab and not to take it off:

When my sister left the classroom crying on her first day because many asked her about Hijab, her teacher went out and started to help her to get through. She told her that “this is how your religion is and you should accept it.” Although she is a Christian, she told her “it is your religion and you should accept it and no one should judge because you are wearing a Hijab. I do not know why you are wearing the Hijab but you should ask your mom and then tell the class. There is nothing upset and sad for wearing the Hijab.” (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

Sukayna continued to talk about her experience with this advocate teacher and how she reinforced the importance of respecting religion even if it’s different from the majority:

The student who tried to pull my Hijab off after the school was suspended. The teacher told him how it is my religion and he should be okay with it. He knows he is going to get consequences. She asked him to say sorry. Then I said it is okay. She interrupted me and said it is not okay; she turned to me and said it is my religion and how she is not wearing Hijab because Islam is not her religion and she won’t go to hell because she is not Muslim, but since Islam is my religion and if I don’t wear it then I am. She said, “you shouldn’t say it is okay because pulling off your Hijab is big trouble and this should never happen in the school.” My

school is very good as everyone cares about others. She said it would be a bad reputation for the school. The next day the teacher talked about bullying because he was bullying me. And there was this police officer who came and started talking about bullying. He talked about people from different religions and we should respect them and not bully them because they do not have the same belief as you. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

Educating others about religion. The participants also argued that there is a need to educate others about Islam in order to avoid any misrepresentations caused by the media and other resources. For Sukayna, it is important to be a role model and act properly in order to be more welcomed to talk about Islam:

Respect is really big and people should learn to respect girls with Hijab. The more they understand, the more it is easier to treat girls with Hijab. We need to educate them. I think you have to be a good person to represent the images of Muslim women. If there was an interview, you have to set a good image of Muslim women even if you are in a bad mood; you have to act properly to set goods images so they don't think bad of Muslim women. (Sukayna, interview transcripts)

Some of the participants called for a dialogue that would allow Muslim girls to clarify misconceptions and allow students to learn about people from different backgrounds:

- “We need to explain how these images are not true and give examples. We need to have this dialogue with them” (Tabarak, interview transcripts).
- “Schools need to give more opportunities to learn more about others who don't have the same cultural activities” (Batoul, focus group transcripts).

- “I want my teachers to learn about Islam and my Hijab. I like to speak to them about fasting and the big feast we have after the sunset” (Maasuma, interview transcripts).

Noor, on the other hand, felt that the teachers should try to listen to others like her and respond to her needs: “Teachers need to listen to us. They do not listen to our needs unless adults like our moms ask for it” (Noor, interview transcripts).

Equity, moral values, and the expression of human rights. Some of the participants addressed issues related to moral values and the need to consider those values when working with people from different backgrounds. Sukayna mentioned how in many cases those who hurt others are not aware of the pain they cause with their actions or words: “I think people sometimes don’t think about what they say and they just think there is nothing that can affect another person. They are not aware that they hurt others with their words” (Sukayna, focus group transcripts). Batoul, on the other hand, spoke of her simple right to be respected as a human being: “I just want to see people respect other people as part of our humanity. It’s not really that important to come out and say things disrespectfully to other people; it’s just something that’s not nice to see” (Batoul, focus group transcripts)

Some of the participants also spoke about how the schools respect Muslims’ fasting during Ramadan (the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, in which practicing Muslims refrain from eating during daylight hours) and show empathy by providing them with places where they can stay during lunch time: “They really respect our fasting. They let me and my sister go to the computer lab so we don’t see other people eating. They support us with this” (Rukaya, interview transcripts).

In sum, the recommendations provided by the participants were geared towards the importance of religion, with its moral values and ritual stories that encouraged the participants to gain confidence and strength to stand up for what they believe in. The role of the Muslim community and mothers influenced the participants' understanding of their religious commitment. They also counted highly on the advocacy of teachers to help minority students feel safe and accepted. The participants identified familiarity as an important factor for accommodating students from diverse backgrounds in non-diverse settings. As a result, they stressed the importance of educating non-Muslims about Islam in order to clarify any misrepresentations about themselves as well as their religion. Ultimately, they called on others to adopt a more benevolent view of humanity as a whole in order to reinforce acceptance for students like them.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 presented the results of this study which encompassed 10 emerging themes derived from data collected through interviews and focus group meetings with the study participants. Within the social world of their home and community, the first theme documented the participants' understanding of their Shi'i religious identities through the moral values imparted by historical ritual stories and exemplary female role models. The second theme described the participants' understanding of the literal and the deeper symbolic meanings of the Hijab. The intersectionality between religion, culture, and gender comes across most of the themes and is related to the participants' experiences with wearing the Hijab. The fourth theme described the influence of visits "back home" on the participants' religious commitment through the Shi'i oppression of "back home" and visits to religious shrines. With the social world of their schools, the fifth theme

described how the “us versus them” language used by the participants reinforced their collectivist religious nature, as well the differences associated between minority and majority groups. The sixth theme addressed the tension between religious and secular ideologies and dialogue in the school environment, while the seventh theme corresponded to the participants’ awareness of the absence of religion and addressed the common values among Islam and Christianity as a means to alleviate cultural and religious differences. The eighth theme presented the religious racialized gendered discrimination faced by the participants for wearing the Hijab. The ninth theme described the participants’ preference to stay silent when faced with discrimination. The 10th theme provided recommendations suggested by the participants to ease the accommodation of Muslim females in non-diverse settings. In all, the 10 themes illustrated the complex nature of Shi’i Muslim females’ identities that are interwoven into their everyday lives, both in their schools as well as in their communities.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This is a qualitative case study of how 10 young female Shi'i Muslim Arabic-Canadian students negotiate their racial, cultural, and religious identities associated with wearing the Hijab (headscarf) within the contexts of predominantly White Canadian public elementary schools and their homes and communities. In my effort to discuss the main findings, I reiterate that the researcher's reflexivity throughout the process of this research is of a developmental nature. After analyzing the data, I became conscious of my identity as a Shi'i female observing the Hijab; the identity that was silenced in my childhood is empowered and legitimized within the Canadian context through this research.

Engaging in the process of critical reflexivity has reshaped my awareness of my complex and at times competing roles as insider and outsider. These complex roles influenced my acknowledgement of the multiple views about the relevant literature related to the following issues: Shi'i Muslim doctrine, Muslim identity, the school experiences of Muslim students, the methodology and procedures that govern this study, semi-structured interviews and focus meetings, and qualitative data collection and analysis. Most importantly, my reflexivity is an eye-opening experience that makes me aware of the influences of social context in shaping the identity of minority Muslim females. All the emerging themes aligned with the dynamic social contexts that consist of the participants' home, community, and school environments. Furthermore, analysing these young girls' multiple contexts within the Canadian multiculturalism added different layers of complexity in terms of the various values that control each social world both as a separate entity and when combined with other values in other social worlds. Most importantly, the White monocultural school setting challenges the girls' religious and cultural values and

repeatedly places them in vulnerable positions. Within this non-diverse setting, the girls found the Muslim community as a space where they feel free to negotiate and celebrate their cultural and religious values.

This chapter provides a discussion of the main finding that amalgamates the major themes related to the girls' contexts of school, home, and community. This primary finding is described as the integrated identity of Shi'i Muslim females within the context of Islam and the West. The primary finding is inspired by two key elements shown in the data; these elements impact the contemporary literature about the role of Muslim community in non-diverse settings, which creates a space that nurtures the growth of Muslim identity through the intersectionality of gender, culture, and religion and holistic and culturally responsive teaching that stands for respect of others' religiosity and spirituality. This finding will be followed by a discussion of recommendations and implications. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for future research.

Integrated Identity of Shi'i Muslim Females Within an Islamic–Western Context

As mentioned earlier, the major finding is discussed based on the girls' social world encompassing their home, community, and school environments. The social world of the home and community are aligned with each other because both the parents' and the community's values share similar religious and cultural ideals of "back home." The social world of the school represents the girls' most significant challenges and elicits their recommendations to preserve their identities. Akhtar (2007) addresses the conflicting values of Muslim and Western cultures; according to him, this conflict can harm Muslims when the Western culture dominates the Muslim culture. Furthermore, Akhtar notes that Muslims in both cultures may experience "dissociated identity disorder" (p. 73) in which

Muslims have no choice but to accept the Western values and the rules. Akhtar refers to four outcomes of such cultural conflicts. The first is isolationism, in which Muslims stick to their inherited values and ignore the larger reality of the dominant values surrounding them; this is where Muslims construct their own internal world and isolate themselves from the outside world. The second outcome is assimilation, in which Muslims favour the values of the dominant culture over their own values. The third outcome is when Muslims are aware of the differences of the values and work towards equal values, but only for the short term. The fourth outcome is marginalization, whereby Muslims cannot make choices that make them feel content. Akhtar views the four outcomes as insufficient and provides an integrated approach whereby Muslims can combine the Western values with their own. With this model, the focus should be on the moral values of Islam. For instance, he refers to the new integrated identity as a “green zone” that incorporates parallel Western and Islamic values such as honesty, giving, and caring for others. He also calls for avoiding Western cultural values that contradict Islam, such as excessive individualism and “free sex,” which he refers to as a “red zone.” Moreover, he refers to a “grey zone” as a site of Western values and practices towards which Muslims are neutral, such as physical activities and body image. In sum, the “bigger the domain in which the two cultures agree, the better it is for mental health” (p. 95).

Furthermore, Smart-Mosrtad and Morstad (2009) present a case study of a Danish school that paid significant attention to the implementation of holistic educational programming for students coming from Muslim immigrant households. Danish school teachers search for activities that honour both Western and the Islamic cultures, questioning the traditions while respecting the religious values without demeaning them. These teachers

found that looking for the common values between the two cultures—such as sports activities that accommodate Muslim girls’ religious needs—contributes to positive relationship between the students and the teachers and reduces the tensions that Muslim students face due to the discrepancies between the two cultures.

Similarly, this current study supports other research on Muslim youth in the West that identified the need to have an integrated model for developing Muslim identity fostered by both Canadian and Islamic values. To illustrate, two key elements from the data address the girls’ negotiation of the values in the social world of their home and community as well as their schools. They are discussed as follows:

1. The role of the Muslim community in non-diverse settings as a space for the growth of integrated Muslim identity that is negotiated through the intersectionality of gender, culture, and religion.
2. Holistic and culturally responsive teaching that stands for respect of others’ religiosity and spirituality.

Role of Muslim Community for Growth of Integrated Muslim Identity in Non-Diverse Settings

All the participants acknowledged the role of their mothers in shaping their identity as Shi’i Muslim females. I also noticed that mothers who were highly educated and active in the Muslim community had a significant impact on their daughters’ religiosity compared to mothers who were less active in the community. This corresponds to the research done on Dutch families that mentioned that parental involvement in the community influences the religiosity of children to a level higher than that of parents with less community involvement (Vermeer, 2011). In the current study, Tubarak’s strong religiosity that is

evident through her interaction with others from the dominant groups (e.g., her call for interfaith dialogue with others, her strong attention to the global issues and oppression in the Middle East, and her role as a Muslim to spread the word of Islam) is influenced by her mother who is a very active member of the Muslim community in terms of her regular lectures and social activities geared towards educating young Muslim girls about their religion. Moreover, most of the participants whose mothers are active members of the Muslim community (such as Sukayna, Batoul, and Zaina) adhered deeply to the moral values of the ritual Shi'i stories and the transformational meaning of the Hijab. In the following sections, the integrated model of identity of Shi'i Muslim females is discussed within religious and cultural paradigms and through reference to Shalabi's research (2010) that was conducted in Ottawa, Canada. (The reason for this comparison is to elaborate on the similarities and the differences of the recent study with Shalabi's research focusing on the Sunni Muslim community.) Most importantly, the analysis of the participants' experiences takes into account the intersectionality of gender, culture, and religion along with other categories such as ethnicity and race. By doing so, I hope the reader will gain insights about the diversity of Muslims and the unique nature of this current research that focuses on the Shi'i minority group.

Religious Paradigm

In a recent study that addresses the influence of Islamic values on Muslim households from the parents' perspectives in Ottawa, Canada, Shalabi (2010) focuses on the centrality of the religion, the cultural paradigms, and the identity negotiation of Muslims both in their own social world and in that of the larger society. Shalabi confirms Muslim students' spirituality by noting their adherence to Islamic teachings and ritual

practices (e.g., prayer, fasting). Mainly, she focuses on the concept of god-consciousness that encompasses a system of reward and punishment, and of pleasing God and parents alike. My study, similar to Shalabi's findings, demonstrates the centrality of religion in the lives of Shi'i Muslim females in terms of the participants' adherence to the concept of submitting to God, getting hasanat, following the daily rituals of prayers, fasting, and wearing the Hijab at the age of takleef.

However, the participants were deeply connected to the Shi'is ideology of sacrifice, social justice, and the role of the female exemplary model as integral parts of their understanding of their identity as Muslim females and their interaction with others. All the participants agreed that the sacrifices of Imam Hussein and the role of his sister Sayeda Zainab provided them with a spiritual commitment that carves out a safe space for them that is filled with confidence, courage, and the patience to stand up for their beliefs. The participants viewed the gender role through its intersectionality with religion in terms of the active role of Sayeda Zainab. For instance, the participants refer to Sayeda Zainab's response and opposition to patriarchal values and corruption, most notably when she delivered her eloquent speech against the corrupt leader Yazid and other oppressive male figures. The participants refer to this historical event as a means to reiterate the strength of a gender role that responds to any unjust actions, regardless of the patriarchal values whereby women may not be allowed to oppose men.

This perspective of viewing women as active agents is highly represented in Shari'atī's (2011b) lectures as well as in work by other Shi'i religious scholars. For instance, Valibeigi (2012) addresses the historical role of Shi'i women who oppose patriarchy by analyzing various opinions espoused in Iranian weblogs, through which she

describes how the role of Sayeda Zainab's mother and grandmother represent anti-traditionalist thought, such as in the following passage:

By talking about Islamic history from a different feminine angle, Morteza presents a hidden aspect of Muslim history which is built by women. The status of Fatima and Khadija are not ignored in the traditional and fundamental perspectives, but referring to them as the source of anti-traditionalism and political activism is not a familiar concept. ... Its appearance on the weblogs reveals that this challenge to patriarchy can be considered even more seriously due to the Internet's broad range of audience and free access. (p. 87-88)

In the current study, Sayeda Zainab acts as a timeless role model, and it is interesting to see how these girls focused on gender roles when they described this historical exemplary model. For instance, they all found the power of what some referred to as "the power of girls." The gender role represented by Sayeda Zainab or her mother Sayeda Fatima motivated the participants to acknowledge their roles as females and empowered them to stand up for what they believe in and to respond to the discrimination they faced in their schools. The female exemplary models of Shi'i faith reinforce the significant role of women acting as active agents against unjust actions. This Shi'i understanding of the role of women was internalized in some of the participants (such as Tabarak, Sukayna, Batoul, Zeina, and Rukaya) and pushed them to negotiate their identity within the larger global society. In this respect, they viewed themselves as active agents who could respond to the discourses of others who present stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed and marginalized, and they instead called for their rights as humans to be accepted.

In other words, the themes that emerged from the data challenge the essentialist notion of gender issues for Muslims in terms of connecting Muslim women to patriarchal and orientalist images (i.e., women as oppressed). Wearing the Hijab therefore need not be associated with an oppressive negative image but instead with moral and human values represented by the ritual stories the girls grew up with in their homes and community. The current research demonstrates the participants' response against patriarchy when they critiqued the negative images associated with Muslim women. For instance, Rukaya was active and tried to educate her peers about the diversity of Muslim women's experiences in terms of ethnicity, religious practices, and race after watching the movie about Afghan women, and she confirmed that Muslim women are not oppressed. Tabarak also critiqued the stereotypes associated with Muslim women as individuals who are oppressed, beaten, and forced to wear the Hijab.⁷

Participants in the current study thereby echo the views of Hoodfar's (2003) participants and their active roles in refusing the patriarchal values (male family-member control) through their self-taught knowledge about the proper religious practices (e.g., Muslim women's right to choose their spouse and to become educated, active members of society). The current study, similar to Hoodfar's work, distinguished between the patriarchal values and Islamic practices through the participants' understanding of the role

⁷ It is important to note that the resistance of the girls in the current study is not merely due to patriarchal values but also to the intersectionality of gender, religion, ethnicity, race, and colonization that differ based on the context. For instance, Rukaya's response to the movie about Afghan women touches upon the resistance that incorporates the intersectionality of gender, religion, ethnicity, and race.

of gender. However, in the current study, the participants refer to the Shi'i female exemplary model in their understanding of the role of women—and this aligns with much other research that focuses on Shi'i Muslim females (Aghaie, 2005; Deeb, 2006; Valibeigi, 2012)—while in Hoodfar's study the participants referred to their learning about the proper Islamic law. This difference also indicates the differences between Sunni and Shi'i Muslim females' experiences.

The themes of martyrdom and self-sacrifice reveal how the Shi'i Muslim females were highly influenced by their Islamic Shi'i values and the impact of those values on their interaction with others in their schools. The participants pointed out that wearing the Hijab was a global phenomenon that is gaining in popularity, and therefore the schools should be more familiar with the meaning and practice of the Hijab. They also appreciated the significance of the Hijab from the ritual stories related to Sayeda Zainab, particularly when she asked the soldiers to ensure care was taken with the captured women as they were dragged from Karbala to Damascus so that people would not stare at their revealed faces. The participants reiterated their willingness to wear the Hijab by referring to this historical incident and other such incidents that supported the importance of the Hijab. The meaning of the Hijab for the participants was transformational and not merely connected to garments but rather to a set of defined modest behaviours and actions. They also viewed the Hijab as a sign of their religious identity that they must respect and be proud of; this is similar to what other Muslim females said about the importance of wearing the Hijab (Mahfoodh, 2008; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009).

Cultural Paradigm

With Shalabi's (2010) cultural paradigm, the focus is on the cultural institutions of the mosque and home that incorporate the collectivist values of family, where family ties and parents' authority are highly appreciated and act as the main factors in enhancing the Muslim students' Islamic values. Shalabi (2010) also addresses the diversity of ethnicity and the Shi'i oppression of "back home" and its influence of the parents' decision to raise their children with the focus on the Arabic language and Islamic values. In the present study, the participants acknowledged the role of Islamic centres and their mothers in enhancing their religious understandings, and they expressed their sense of belonging that was nonexistent in their schools.

Similar to Shalabi's research, the participants were influenced by the Shi'i oppression of "back home" in terms of traumatic war incidents; however, the participants were aware of the religious discrimination and unjust marginalization against Shi'i groups in the Middle East. Most importantly, the intersection of religious and cultural paradigms is revealed by the participants' experiences and the effects their visits of back home had on their identities as Shi'i Muslim females. For instance, Tabarak recalled her trip to Iraq and the criminal actions practiced against her grandparents and the suffering and strength of her grandmother who kept on reminding her children of their father's execution due to his loyalty to his Shi'i faith. Tabarak also commented on the recent actions that occurred in Bahrain and expressed her responsibility to observe her religious commitment for the cause of justice.

The participants also reiterated an important element related to Shi'i ideology, which is the power of performing pilgrimages to Imam Hussein's shrine (Aghaie, 2004,

2005; Takim, 2006; Valibeigi, 2012). With the latter visit, the pilgrim gains the blessing of the Imams. The Shi'i religious loyalty to the household of the prophet is

revitalized through the ziyarat and the rituals at the places these holy men have sacralised; their presence. The ziyarat evokes the presentia and the potential of the imams indicating to the participants that the imams are powerful and charismatic in their deaths as they were in their lives. At the shrines, the pilgrim is also able to experience the charisma, curative and salvific powers of the imams. (Takim, 2006, p. 66)

In the current research, the participants reinforced their sense of religious belonging that was strengthened and empowered when they joined other visitors in those sacred places. This sense of belonging resonates with Durkheim's analysis of the role of ritual practices in strengthening the beliefs and the sense of belonging for religious groups (as cited in Elbadri, 2009). The participants felt the power of the Imam, much like Takim's (2006) description of how "the pilgrim sends salutations to the imam, acknowledges his authority, affirms allegiance to the imams and then beseeches him to mediate with God" (p. 65).

The participants also acknowledged the intersectionality of gender, religion, and culture that they gained during their visits back home; for instance, they observed that the practice of wearing the Hijab was more cultural than religious to the women in Iraq, while the participants wore the Hijab based on their understanding of religious values. This corresponds to Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008), who relate the Hijab to different national and international contexts in order to highlight the complexity and diversity of Muslim women's experiences and the historical contexts of colonization that depict Muslim women and veil through negative imagery. In the current study, Batoul believes that the choice of

wearing the Hijab in Iraq conforms to cultural practices while in Canada it has more to do with religious choice. This once again is similar to Hoodfar's (2003) analysis of the meanings associated with wearing the Hijab in which she refers to the intersectionality of gender, religion, and culture. She confirms that her study's Somali participants wore the Hijab based primarily on their attachment to their religious identity than the Iranian women due to latter's attitudes that opposed the Iranian Revolution through which Iranian parents associated wearing the Hijab with oppressive Iranian regimes. This also shows the role of ethnicity and back home on the various experiences related with wearing the Hijab.

Furthermore, in the current research the participants associated wearing the Hijab with religious discourses (e.g., getting rewards, submitting to God) in which they viewed the choice of the Hijab from a religious perspective. This again is similar to Hoodfar (2003) who viewed the Hijab as "voluntary act" based on the participants' associating the meaning of the Hijab to religiosity and as an adaptive strategy to be integrated both in their own communities as well as in the broader Canadian society. Similarly, the participants in Mahfoodh's (2008) study associate the use of the Hijab with a religious perspective: "I wear the Hijab to carry the flag of Islam" (p. 52). In most research on Muslim females, the participants count on the Hijab as a signifier for their religious identity and thus respond to the social exclusion they face in the larger society by being more attached to their collectivist religious values (Alvi et al., 2003; Mahfoodh, 2008; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Shalabi, 2010; Zine, 2001).

Concept of Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality connects most of the themes in which participants' experiences are linked by culture, religion, and gender. The meaning of Hijab is associated

with codes of modesty and certain behaviours, and the participants express how the Hijab relates to a transitional age at which they become mature and responsible for their actions. However, they differ on how they respond to such transition. For instance, Noor seemed to have some challenges with respect to her behaviour and feelings. During the interview, she described how the Hijab was a turning point for her and how she gained a better of understanding of the meaning of responsibility when she became 9 years of age. Noor even stated how wearing the Hijab made her brave, and she talked about the support she received from her mother, which made the transition easy for her:

Hijab is a shield that is used not for fighting but for bravery. I am brave because I am the only one wearing the Hijab in the school. I always have a teacher who speaks to me about my differences. I am different with my skin colour, religion, and controlling myself. When my mom came and celebrated my Takleef party in the class, she talked about the Hijab as a difference that needs to be respected, and how the party is of responsibility. I felt very proud and big, and that I do not have to be shy for who I am. (Noor, interview transcripts)

Most importantly, Noor acknowledged that the ritual stories of the Imam encouraged her to feel that she was not alone when struggling with her differences. She also correlated the Imam narrative with the story of Jesus in order to be more compatible with her classmates. This mirrors the views of most of the participants, who used complex religious interfaith dialogues with their non-Muslim peers to alleviate the cultural and religious differences. Again the Hijab is connected to the Shi'i ritual stories in which the participants learned the importance of the Hijab from Sayeda Zainab, and learned about the commitment to educate others about their religious practices, to be patient, and to stand up

for their beliefs. In other words, the participants' experiences with wearing the Hijab are associated with the intersectionality of religion and gender, most notably in terms of the impact of ritual stories on the girls' behaviours.

Moreover, with Noor, the Hijab is related to her ability to manage her behaviour. Noor gained confidence and was able to understand and anticipate the meaning of the Hijab with the support of her mother, even though Noor sensed she was different than her classmates. Her mother's role as an advocate helped Noor to negotiate her religious identity in her school. But despite the fact that wearing the Hijab helped Noor to gain more confidence and peace, she also talked about the challenge she faced when she tried to stay calm and quiet in response to the expectations that girls have to be polite and good listeners. In Mahfoodh's (2008) research, the participants addressed the behavioural expectations associated with the Hijab: "Hijab means establishing maturity and departing from all the 'silly behaviors' of little children" (p. 59). In the current research, the participants also associated the Hijab with maturity and being *mukalafa* (responsible). All the participants understand that they have to behave well as part of their understanding that the Hijab does not merely represent a piece of clothing.

There also are cultural expectations related to gender whereby the girls are expected to be quiet and polite. The participants interact differently to those cultural and religious expectations. For instance, while they all acknowledge the role of Hijab in helping them to gain confidence and maturity, Noor still struggles to balance her behaviour with the cultural expectations; however, she does acknowledge that the Hijab's religious associations (e.g., in terms of having angels who record her good and bad deeds) remind her to better manage her behaviour. Again, here Noor refers to the religious perspective in her understanding of

her role as a Muslim female who is inspired by the Imam and the female exemplary model and her understanding of the Hijab's role in helping to manage her behaviours. It therefore is important to incorporate the intersectionality of gender, culture, and religion as Noor's experiences do not align with merely a single category (i.e., gender). This also corresponds to Muslim feminists' analysis of the experiences of Muslim females in which they incorporate the concept of intersectionality (Cooke, 2008, Hoodfar, 2003; Hamdan, 2006).

One of the most significant examples of cultural and religious intersectionality is the celebration of responsibility at age 9. While the celebration itself is not mandatory, it is a way of encouraging young girls and emphasizing that to Shi'is, age 9 represents a religious transitional stage of gaining responsibility. The celebrations are underscored by certain cultural practices and rituals. For instance, the young participants in these celebrations wear white gowns and recite certain ritualistic readings that demonstrate the responsibilities that the mukalafa should follow. The locations for such celebrations are usually well-decorated and presents are provided. Though it basically is a coming of age birthday celebration that happens at age 9 (according to the Islamic calendar), the party does entail gift-giving in the conventional, Western sense of birthday parties, but instead bestows upon the young Muslim girl the gift of responsibility for observing an Islamic lifestyle that includes wearing the Hijab, just as adults do. A girl becomes accountable for observing her Islamic duties and becomes accountable for her good and bad deeds as she becomes a mukalafa. This kind of celebration may differ from one culture to another based on families' financial status, religiosity, and education, but regardless such cultural differences, the Lebanese and the Iraqi participants all related the positive experiences they had in their respective celebrations.

It is also interesting to see that only one mother sought to have this kind of celebration in her daughter's school and how it was positively welcomed by the teachers and the principal. Noor expressed how her fear to be the only Muslim girl in the school wearing the Hijab was lessened when her mother pushed this celebration to be shared at school with her non-Muslim peers. The current study thus encourages other parents living in monocultural settings to approach their daughters' respective schools in order to reduce the tensions and the fear associated with such situations. However, parents need to build a strong rapport with the school before assuming the school will accept such celebration. In the current research, Noor's mom developed a strong relationship with the administrators and the teachers through her regular visits to the school, as Noor mentioned during the interview. This corresponds to Shalabi's (2010) research that refers to Muslim mothers' role in socializing their daughters in terms of reinforcing religious and cultural practices. However, Shalabi addresses the active role of the mothers in the Muslim community rather than in the school environment. The current research calls for the involvement of mothers both in the school setting as well as in the Muslim community.

One of the intersectionalities of the religious-cultural paradigm is evident with the case of Noor. As I mentioned earlier, Noor is an example of a young girl who negotiates her identity within a backdrop of culture, religion, and gender. She was aware that her religious practices and her transitional age helped her out with her behavior; however, she also shared the challenges she faced in her Muslim community due to her physical impulses (i.e., moving and jumping) that conflict with certain gender rules and expectations. In my experience, the level of composure required of Muslim girls wearing the Hijab adheres more to cultural than religious expectations. Cultural expectations are

not uniform throughout; they differ from one ethnicity to another. This was also evident in Mahfoodh's research (2008); she linked this level of composure only to one participant from Bahrain. Such gendered expectations may create tensions for girls like Noor, especially as she works on negotiating her identity within the sphere of religious (e.g., being responsible for her acts) and gendered expectations (e.g., following certain behavioural codes in front of adults). Those tensions may also raise questions about the need to be aware of the cultural and gendered expectations that differ from one culture to another when examining the experiences of young Muslim girls with the Hijab. Noor also appreciated her mother's role in supporting her in the school and the Muslim community. This current research thereby provides a vivid example of the role of religion and parental involvement in reinforcing positive experiences with minority children.

Generally speaking, my study agrees with Hodge and Nadir (2008) who confirm that the Muslim lifestyle is holistic and encompasses spirituality and different factors that influence the experiences of Muslims:

life is seen as a holistic experience in which the spiritual informs all aspects of existence. Among the more commonly affirmed are community, consensus, interdependence, self-control, complementary gender roles, implicit communication that safeguards others' opinions, and identity rooted in religion, culture and family.
(p. 32)

With this proviso in mind, the values of the participants in their social worlds of home and community influenced their interactions in and their understanding of the social world of the dominant group. This is evident in the themes that addressed the participants' challenges and their attempts to preserve their religious and cultural identities in their

schools. The following section discusses holistic and culturally responsive teachings that stand for respecting others' religiosity and spirituality in relation to the various themes that emerged in the context of the social world of the schools: us versus them mentality; religious and complex secular dialogues; absence of Muslim representation in monocultural schools; discrimination; and remaining silent versus speaking out.

Holistic and Culturally Responsive Teaching That Advances Respect for Others'

Religiosity and Spirituality

In the current study, the participants shared their challenges as Muslim females wearing the Hijab in monocultural settings. They shared the different contexts in which they were excluded and isolated where they experienced various kinds of discrimination such as bullying, weird looks, racial jokes, being disliked and ignored, and other negative attitudes. Their experiences in the schools encompass the discourse of others who were cited in research conducted on Muslim students (e.g., Akseer, 2011; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Watt, 2011, Zine, 2001). Although there were moments where Muslim youths experienced a kind of dissociation (Akhtar, 2007), the current study documented silencing as a strategy that was used by some of the participants in their response to discrimination. Sandra Bosacki (2005a) refers to a political silence whereby the students of ethnic and minority populations use this strategy in White settings. Bosacki explained that those who practice such political silence instead share their problems in their community, where they feel safe. However, those who manifest such political silence may end up "depressed and self- alienated" (p. 90).

In the current study, the participants who preferred to stay silent expressed their awareness that they were already in vulnerable situations and therefore lessened their

tension by staying silent. They were also aware of the dynamic peer and teacher's reaction if they spoke out about their problems (Bosacki, 2005a). For instance, Noor faced racial discrimination and her teacher did not take serious action until Noor's mother reported to the school that her daughter overheard a racial comment about her skin. Noor was aware that speaking out directly to the teacher was not a good strategy to stop the discrimination. Noor's incident exemplifies Martino and Rezai-Rashti's (2008) study of ethnocentric attitudes that Muslim students face in schools. In many situations, school administrators and teachers who may perceive Muslim female students with backwards orientalist images of oppression may also fail to understand such students' needs and challenges.

Specifically, Rezai-Rashti (1994) talked about her experiences as a counselor in public schools where she noticed that "There are numerous cases that are uncritically attributed to cultural inferiority associated with students' backgrounds" (p. 80). Rezai-Rashti (1994, 1999, 2005) confirms that in a Canadian context, Muslim females face racialized, gendered discrimination that pushes them to assimilate into the Western culture and to lose their identities (e.g., by anglicizing their names, or rejecting their own culture and/or religion). In the current study, Batoul shared different experiences in which she realized that her teacher would not take serious action if she spoke about the religious discrimination she was subjected to, as she was aware that the peers in her class would not support her. Batoul chose to stay silent and isolated herself from her peers, which corresponds to Bosacki's (2005a) discussion of political silence.

Sukayna, however, disagreed with silencing herself and shared her experiences with bullying and the teacher's advocate role in supporting her. Sukayna was strong and spoke directly to her teacher as she knew that the educator would act seriously. Batoul's and

Sukayna's different scenarios demonstrate the role of the teacher on the minority student's response to discrimination. It is also clearly evident that the context and the kind of discrimination influence the student's decision to stay silent; the participants in the current research were aware of the stereotypes and the negative images that made them vulnerable and made them feel unable to respond to discrimination.

Student–Teacher–Peer Relationships in the Classroom

The participants viewed their relationship with their peers and their teachers as being predicated on their position as “others.” I noticed that they defined themselves as Muslims moreso than their ethnical identities as Lebanese or Iraqi when discussing their identity struggles in their school. For instance, all the participants refer to themselves as Muslims rather than as Iraqi or Lebanese; throughout the interviews and the focus- group meetings they identified themselves as Muslims and their understanding of the meaning of the Hijab was predicated on religious discourses. This may be due to the role of the Muslim community in enhancing their religious identity over other factors. This adherence to their religious identity corresponds to other research (e.g., Naber, 2005; Otterbeck, 2011; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009) that documented the dominance of religious identification over other personal identifications for Muslim youth. In the current study, the participants associated with their religious identification especially through their visible religious dress code. I also found that their adherence to the Shi'i moral values of sacrifice, belief in social justice, and the active role of females influenced their focus on their religious identity more than on their ethnical identification.

This may not resonate with Otterback (2011), who confirms that Muslims are cognizant of and exemplify religious identification regardless of the degree of their

religiosity. In the current study, the degree of religiosity is important as the participants who have deep understanding of their Shi'i religious moral values were more connected to their Islamic values and took a critical and constructive stance to face the discrimination faced in their schools. For instance, Tabarak and Sukayna were good examples of Muslim females who adopted the strategy of educating others about their religion as a means of reducing or ending discrimination. On the other hand, younger participants (such as Yasmeen and Massuma) were more vulnerable to discrimination and at times chose to assimilate into the dominant culture, such as when Yasmeen isolated herself from a new Muslim student in her class in order to be accepted by her peers. This relates to Akhtar (2007), who addresses the inferior feeling Muslim youth may experience due to the conflicting values of Muslim and Western cultures in which Muslims have no choice but to accept Western values and rules. Consequently Muslims may favour the values of the dominant culture over their own values.

Furthermore, the participants in the current research may be more affiliated with their Islamic identity due to the generalization of Muslims being viewed by the dominant group as a single homogeneous group (i.e., as Muslims) or because their Muslim identity does in fact dominate their ethnic background, even outside the school's environment.

Critical race theory tackles the issue of the hegemony that places minority groups in vulnerable situations and highlights the strategies used by minority groups in order to preserve their social and cultural values (Ladson-Billings & Donner, 2005). Moreover, minority children may internalize the dominant group's perceptions of themselves and work towards assimilation in order to survive. In the current study, Yasmeen expressed her trials of trying to be the "cool girl" and to be accepted by her peers. However, other

minority children may resist the dominant group's ideologies when they become aware of the implicit disempowerment and they may challenge unfair actions (Egbo, 2009).

Participants such as Sukayna explained that Muslim females have to stay strong and act as role models in order to successfully respond to the generalizations and stereotypes propagated about Muslims. Similarly, Sukayna and Tabarak adopted the strategy of educating others as their way to resist any kind of marginalization.

It is also important to address the hidden curriculum that is seen "through participation and interaction in various school activities that promote group norms and ethos" (Egbo, 2009, p. 9). The hidden curriculum may also be evident in the "the school calendar, social and religious celebrations, concerts and festivals, hallway displays, the collections in school libraries, Eurocentric values, and the tacit acceptance of racism and discrimination" (Egbo, 2009, p. 9). In this study, Noor shared her experience when her mom took her to another public school in the evening to listen to a Muslim author who wrote many children stories:

It was one day when my mom took me and my brother to another public school where we met and listened to a Muslim author who talked about her life and stories. I was very happy and proud to see that the author was like me, wearing the Hijab. Also all the corridors have pictures of people from all over the world. In our school, we do not have any thing about other people. I really like this school. (Noor, interview transcripts)

While schools work from standard curriculum inside classrooms, Noor's comments touched upon existing differences in the schooling experience as each school presents a learning environment with knowledge outside the classroom that is unique to its

community of educators and students. It is a hidden knowledge created and delivered by little things that add up to create the big picture of the school and shape the students' learning experiences.

Another example of hidden curriculum can be seen through many teachers' limited knowledge of the variety of Muslim women's experiences and their adherence to the negative stereotyping of Muslim women. The participants were aware of their teachers' limited knowledge that was manifested in their generalization of the experiences of Muslim women. Rukaya's experience in Social Studies class when her teacher played a movie about Afghani women's mistreatment provided a good example of how a teacher's knowledge is often limited when it comes to the literature and discourse related to "others." When teachers lack such knowledge, they can end up either ignoring or facing the consequences of their lack of preparation.

Darling-Hammond, French, and Garcia-Lopez (2002) address the need to value differences by delivering relevant curriculum within a supportive environment. Mohanty (2003) mentions that being engaged in the notion of difference requires a deep understanding about the politics of identity and various factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, and religion. However, teachers may internalize patriarchal oppressive imagery and representations associated with Muslim female students, and this in turn can influence their willingness to be engaged in pedagogical reform (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008). This ignorance of others limits the learning experience as it does not invite students into the deep critical discussions needed to alleviate any racial and negative images corresponding to Muslim females.

In another context, Batoul was asked by her supply teacher to take off her Hijab, thinking that it was a kind of hat or hood:

One day a supply teacher asked me to take off my Hijab based on one students' request who complained about her request to remove his cap while letting me wear my Hijab. The teacher directly turned to me and asked me to remove my Hijab. I was embarrassed and told her that I cannot as it is part of my religion. She simply said ok without any comment. (Batoul, interview transcripts)

Here again, Batoul's story demonstrates the need for teachers to respond carefully to biases and discrimination in different contexts, and the power of hidden curriculum in maintaining the values of the dominant group as discussed by Egbo (2009) and by Sensoy and Stonebanks (2009). The participants also explained their concerns about participating in certain activities that failed to accommodate their dress code, such as the crazy hair day in which they endured some verbal discrimination from their peers.

Another example can be seen through Zeina and Yasmeen's complaints regarding the exclusion of Muslim medieval history in a curriculum that instead focused on European events. Again, they highlighted the need to include knowledge about others as this would provide positive messages, such as the successful contributions of Muslim medieval scholars in science, philosophy, and other fields. Acknowledging solely the dominant group's values and ignoring cultural diversity in the curriculum may influence the minority group's engagement in the learning (Marshall, 2002). The current research agrees with Powell, Cantrell, and Adams (2001) who discuss school texts that privilege the dominant group's values over others. Rukaya and Batoul agree that the schools in monocultural settings do not include or address knowledge about others. Batoul also mentioned that they

may not do so due to the complexity of diversity, the misrepresentation of others, or the lack of knowledge about others. Sensoy's (2009) research on representations of Muslims in textbooks demonstrates the dominance of colonizer discourses and the inferiority of depictions related to Muslim culture. For instance, they refer to portrayals of Islamic nations that appear as uncivilized and undeveloped countries. In this respect, teachers need to be careful when they select textbooks that represent Muslim groups in order to avoid any such misrepresentation or stereotypes (Henson, 2001).

The participants also complained that their needs to participate in recreational activities are even higher than those of other girls, as they did not have the opportunities for such activities outside their schools due to the difficulties in accommodating their religious needs (i.e., their Hijabs). Most of the participants expressed their frustration at being excluded from activities such as co-ed swimming lessons, and some complained that even when their parents provided them with appropriate swimming suits, the weird looks that they experienced from the public made them hesitant to participate in any of such activities. However, Noor's mother was very determined to provide her daughter with all the recreational activities she could access. Noor explained how her mother bought her a very expensive swimming suit and enrolled her in one-on-one swimming lessons with a female instructor. Noor explained that she enjoyed her swimming lessons, but the weird looks that she noticed from the parents and other instructors in the swimming pool made her feel shy and alienated. She also elaborated on how her mom was very upset when her request to have a female instructor was sometimes not taken into consideration when her female instructor was absent and another supply instructor was male:

My mom always has to explain to the supervisor of the swimming pool that I must have female instructor and I heard her talking once to the supervisor telling her that they should respond to her request and encourage other families like us to bring their daughters. My mom also talked about the need to train the instructor to be friendly to people like us as she noticed how my instructor did not talk to her about my progress after each swimming lesson while she was very nice to other parents.

(Noor, interview transcripts)

Noor's experience with swimming lessons demonstrates the influence of the monocultural setting even outside the school. It is a challenge for minority parents to accommodate their children in non-diverse settings and to provide them with the same opportunities as parents from the dominant groups. Delpit (2006) refers to life chances of minority children in which their choices to develop in a given society are determined by existing options, such as access to knowledge and connections in society; unfortunately, such opportunities and options for minority children are different than those for children from dominant groups. In the current study, the participants referred to the weird looks they experienced in public and their limited opportunities for social activities that accommodated their Hijabs. They turned to the Muslim community as the space where they interact socially with their Muslims friends. Many of the participants mentioned how they needed to be with people like them, and this demonstrates their concerns of being in a monocultural setting. This corresponds to much research on Muslims where the participants acknowledged that the Muslim community provided them with the opportunities to meet with people who shared with them the same beliefs, language, and

culture (Akseer, 2011; Hoodfar, 2003; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Shalabi & Taylor, 2011).

Similarly, the participants also critiqued the lack of acknowledgement of their religious celebrations and were aware that the monocultural context influenced the school's decision to ignore their celebrations (Powell et al., 2001). Within those tensions and negative experiences, the participants in the current research turned to their religion whereby they remembered the struggle of others and were inspired by the courage of a strong female exemplary model. Their spirituality helped them to carve out a safe space where they gained strength and the perseverance to survive. In an educational context, religiosity may contribute to positive moral values that decrease negative undesirable behaviours (e.g., using drugs, abusive drinking, bullying) and reinforce care towards others, and religious identity may motivate moral action (Bosacki, 2005b).

Numerous psychology-based studies (e.g., Blasi, 2004; Gibbs, 2003; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Labsley & Narvaez, 2004) confirm that morality instills a sense of responsibility and obligation in individuals when it constitutes the centre of one's identity. Morality stands for the values such as caring for others, respect, and love, and in the current research the moral values of the ritual stories influenced the participants' behaviours and their understanding of their responsibilities towards themselves as well as towards others. For instance, Tabarak and Sukayna were inspired by the role of Sayeda Zainab and the sacrifice of Imam Hussein, and it was evident in their call for the need to educate others about their religion. Rukaya also was influenced by the moral values of the ritual stories in terms of caring about others and this influenced her responses to her peers who annoyed her as she tried to be patient and friendly to them.

Further, moral identity is linked to context of social relationships and is constructed within the social world (Hart, 2005). Cross-cultural studies may find that moral identity has different forms in different cultures, and thus there is a need to explore the role of identity in reinforcing morality within certain cultural groups (Bosacki, 2005b). Consequently, the present study examines the moral values of Shi'i Muslim female students within their social worlds of communities and schools. The current study supported the holistic approach where Shi'i Muslim female students balanced their inner soul with their body and mind. Specifically, the participants were inspired by the moral values of the Shi'i ritual stories that influenced their understanding of and commitment to their religious practices, their maturity, and their interaction with others. Specifically, the participants worked on fulfilling what was missed in the school by going back to their community, where they felt enriched and empowered by the moral values that they learned. For instance, all the participants acknowledge the role of the Muslim community in providing them with an environment that nurtures their knowledge about their religion and human values in terms of caring about others, sacrifice, and respect.

Finally, the participants' recommendations for preserving their identities reinforce the need for culturally responsive teaching that requires teachers to build a broad base of knowledge that grows and changes as students, contexts, and subject matters shift. Knowledge of self and others (students, parents, and community) is an essential foundation for constructing, evaluating, and altering curriculum and pedagogy so that it is responsive to students (Banks et al., 2005, p. 245). For instance, the participants acknowledged the contexts in which their religiosity was appreciated by the school, such as accommodation strategies that were provided for their fasting, and the advocate roles

of some teachers in building confidence and respect towards their religion. They also critiqued teachers' focus on covering the curriculum too strictly and their lack of cultural sensitivity when addressing issues related to Muslims. They discussed the curriculum that acknowledged Islamic cultures, such as the contributions of Muslims during the medieval period. In this respect, the participants called for greater education about diverse cultures, and such culturally responsive teaching would develop the whole child by connecting “cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant for them” (Gay, 2000p. 29). Most importantly, this current research touches upon universal human values—such as caring about others, the role of women, brotherhood and sisterhood, social justice, and love shared by dominant and minority groups—and notes the importance of interfaith dialogues in order to promote not only awareness but also acceptance among minority and majority groups.

Culturally responsive teaching is multidimensional as it incorporates students' culture in various subject areas. Culturally responsive teaching is transformative as it means respecting the cultures and experiences of various groups and then using them as resources for teaching and learning. Similarly, the participants in the current research recommend that teachers help and encourage students to develop critical thinking skills that are required to omit racism and other forms of oppression that exist in their social world.

Implications

Abo-Zena et al. (2009) view narratives as an empowering tool that responds to the negative images and stereotypes associated with Muslims. By telling stories, the voices of those who face racism and discrimination will be heard and the barriers between “us and them” will be reduced. Such narratives can bridge communities together regardless of their differences. Abo-Zena et al. also call for a critical discussion about media images and invite those with certain religious affiliations to share their faith and values as this will educate others about the differences between cultures and religions. This may help eliminate the tensions that result from intense discrimination against certain minority groups.

The cultural conflicts caused by differences in culture create devastating situations when the minority culture is viewed as inferior. Khan (2009) insists that although Muslim youth were able to confront the challenges they face due to the cultural conflicts between the dominant culture and the Islamic culture, the role educators and the school environment play contributes to the development of integrated Muslim identity that will incorporate the values from both cultures based on acceptance, embracing differences, and respect. By enhancing the Muslim students’ Islamic practices, Muslim youth can gain a sense of belonging to the community of the school, and thus be able to develop hybrid identities (Khan, 2009, p. 38) or an integrated identity (Ahktar, 2007) in which Muslims can strike a balance between their Western and Islamic values. In the following section, a discussion about the implication will be through the lens of critical pedagogy and holistic education. By doing so, the integrated model of Muslim identity can be enriched through the development of pedagogy that is enhanced by contextualized curriculum.

Critical Pedagogy and Holistic Education: Enhancing Contextualized Curriculum That Encompasses Intersectionality

McCarthy, Rezai-Rashti, and Teasley (2009)—in their attempt to examine the various research (Ainscow, 2008; Erickson et al., 2008; Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008; Nieto, Bode, Kang, & Raible, 2008) that explored the relationship among racial, ethnic, and ability-based curriculum—support the finding that “there is little attention to issues of intersectionality or the complex ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality both intersect and cut at right angles to each other in everyday school life” (p. 77). In most of the research in the area of diversity and education, qualitative studies including case studies, ethnographies, and discourse analysis, field notes were used to examine the identity formation of young minorities and to observe the various approaches to teaching multicultural education in the classroom, as well as “the academic achievement gaps that exist between marginalized and dominant group students” (Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008, p. 154).

In other words, McCarthy et al. (2009) call for more studies that examine the construction of the identities of minority groups and provide “sensitive data collection that documents the critical potential and alterity of the uses that young people put to culturally lived and commodified forms, and to the stock of knowledges associated with their heritages and those of others” (p. 92). The current study provided a more rigorous means and calls for a more culturally sensitive approach to the intersectionality of Shi'i Muslim females' identities in various contexts. This is due to the fact that understanding the impact of culture, spirituality, and emotions on the participants' experiences within the various contexts is predicated on understanding the relationship between education

and the factors that influence the construction of Shi'i Muslim females. Villegas and Lucas (2002) focus on the importance of educators' understanding of their students' diverse backgrounds. They encourage teachers to understand their students' social and family lives outside their schools. Acquiring such information would help to understand students' prior knowledge that is needed and used when introducing new knowledge. However, in non-diverse settings, the idea of developing multicultural curriculum is often dismissed due to the belief that this kind of education is needed only for minority students (Nieto et al., 2008). In the current study, Noor talked about her mom's experience when she approached the school principal and parents' council asking for more multicultural activities and her request was dismissed due to the fact that the school was not diverse. The current study agrees with Delpit (2006), who confirms that if teachers ignore students' values and knowledge from their community, then there is a risk of creating further cultural barriers between teachers and their minority students (see Table 3). In many cases, Noor and other participants felt that some of their teachers did not understand or care about them; this is evident when the participants talked about caring, empathetic advocate teachers: if you have a problem talk to a teacher who cares about you and not any teacher" (Sukayna, interview transcript). The current study therefore invites educators to consider their minority students' diverse backgrounds even if there is only one such student in the school.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) explain that the best way to learn about students' backgrounds is from the students themselves. This way, teachers acknowledge authentic learning where students' knowledge is considered seriously and count them as active member in the process of learning. In the current study, Sukayna described her advocate

teacher who listened carefully to her and respected her religious values. Due to the teacher's authentic approach, Sukayna gained confidence and a sense of belonging that motivated her to deepen her understanding of her religious values and to develop a positive approach of educating others about it.

Related studies on African female groups (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Ntseane, 2011) found that gender roles, spirituality, and emotion influence the participants' understanding of their world and their learning. In the current study, spirituality plays an important role in the lives of Shi'i Muslim females. The participants' religion is the heart of how they conceptualize knowledge and life. Their recognition of their faith provided them with a unique epistemological ground that undergirded their understanding of social justice, human suffering, sacrifice, their loyalty to the household of the prophet, and the female role models. Specifically, the participants' adherence to the Shi'i gender role exemplified by Sayeda Zainab influenced their decision to preserve their religious identities and their decision to face various kinds of discrimination and marginalization. The participants also expressed that the female exemplary model of Sayeda Zainab was also emotionally meaningful, based on her emotional reaction and sadness after the death of her brother. In this respect, the human suffering of Shi'is occupies an important element of the participants' lives whereby pain and suffering act as resistance to unjust actions.

Table 3

*Differences Between Participants' Understanding of Advocate and Non-Advocate**Teacher–Student Relations in Classroom*

Participants' understanding of non-advocate teacher–student relations in classroom	Participants' understanding of advocate teacher–student relations in classroom	Participants' responses to advocate teacher relations in classroom
“Othering” concept is dominant	Equity concept is dominant	Seeking help and advice from advocate teacher
Limited knowledge about Muslim others	Eager to listen and learn about Muslim others	Gaining a sense of confidence and belonging
Devaluing others' cultural and religious ideals	Acknowledging others' cultural and religious ideals	Eager to learn about their religion and culture

Much research on the impact of Shi'i rituals emphasized the Shi'i emotional state towards the persecution of the 12 Imams and their sacrifices. The emotional state resulting from Shi'i rituals reminds Shi'i Muslims of the tragedy of Imam Hussein and their responsibility to act against any tyranny and injustice (Elbadri, 2009). Tabarak expresses how crying for Imam Hussein is not simply about commemorating a person but also a stance supporting a symbol of resistance against any social injustice and corruption. The participants' commemoration of Imam Hussein encourages them to develop a strategy of resistance that reconciles their own suffering from discrimination as a part of the human battle against injustice that continues to exist at the present time.

Holistic Education

Banks (2003) turns to teachers and suggests that equity exists when teachers create curriculum and instruction based on students' background, fostering self-determination and attending to oppressed students to prepare teacher candidates for equity pedagogy. This kind of curriculum needs to focus on connections through which students can understand the interdependence of life (Brantmeier, Lin, & Miller, 2010). Brantmeier, Lin, and Miller (2010) refer to six key connections within a holistic approach that need to be integrated in curriculums. They are: subject, earth, community, thinking, body/mind, and soul. With subject connections, the focus may be on interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or curriculum integration. With the earth connections, the connection is made with the indigenous knowledge that acknowledges students' relationship to the earth. With the community connections, teachers appreciate the human connection with each other and with the community at large. The community connections encourage students from dominant groups to appreciate and bond with others

and also provide minority students with a sense of belonging. With the thinking connections, students learn based on their learning styles. With the body/mind connections, the focus is on certain activities such as focus breathing, hand–eye coordination, and concentration that show how the mind can be connected to the body. With soul connections, the attention is given to curriculum for an inner life that encompasses the self-integration that touches upon personal and relevant factors.

The current study demonstrates the holistic elements that contribute to the development of integrated model of Shi'i Muslim females. The participants in the current research acknowledge the connections of their spirituality and mind and body. Specifically, their spirituality is manifested through their religious commitment, their body through their adherence to the cultural and religious rules corresponding to their interaction with the opposite gender, and their mind through their understanding of the meaning of their religious values, particularly the abstract meanings.

Critical Pedagogy

Giroux (as cited in Guilherme, 2006) encourages educators to begin with themselves in order to critically analyze the historical contexts of their lives and to understand their developing sense of racial self-identities. Then, he argues that teachers need to adopt a critical stance towards school knowledge (pedagogy and curriculum), and that taking on a critical stance involves a commitment to adopt critical pedagogy. Giroux believes that the role of critical pedagogy in society does not only address the constant need for debate between knowledge and power, but also acts as a means to actively participate in the process of social change. Giroux adds a new understanding of the teachers' role as intellectuals when he states, “critical pedagogy forges critiques and

agency through a language of skepticism and possibility” (as cited in Guilherme, 2006, p. 168). He invites educators to add a new vocabulary for linking “hope, social citizenship and education to the demands of substantive democracy” (as cited in Guilherme, 2006, p. 170). Briefly, a teacher’s role as an intellectual extends to find ways to become actively involved in social change instead of being restricted to critical and theoretical thinking. In the current study, the participants provided some characteristics describing the ideal advocate teacher figure; one who extends her teaching role as to that of an intellectual who carefully listened to her students and took serious action against discrimination. However, this is not the case for the majority of teachers who care more about the content of the curriculum than minority students’ needs. Rukaya and Batoul talked about the teachers’ concern on curriculum content than on the sensitivity when addressing issues related to the minority Muslim group. For instance, Rukaya explained how her teacher did not critically examine the movies about the experiences of Afghani women, and instead was busy finishing off her work.

Critical pedagogy addresses the groups or individuals whose lives are a constant struggle with discrimination, marginalization, and oppression. Specifically, critical pedagogy considers both the theoretical level and human suffering through the critical consciousness in which a sophisticated understanding of human suffering and transformative action against inequality are raised (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical pedagogy seeks to break the silence of marginalized students by understanding “subjugated forms of knowledge coming from those various oppressed groups and examining them in relation to other forms of academic knowledge” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 26). Similarly, Mogadime and Ramrattan Smith (2007) call for the need to consider Muslim youths’

diverse experiences through the implementation of culturally responsive approaches in which minority Muslim students will have the space to navigate their identities. In the current research, the recommendations provided by the participants call for taking into consideration their inner life as represented by their spirituality and their understanding of justice and equity that was conveyed by the Shi'i ritual stories and exemplary historical models. In this respect, the participants call for pedagogy that counts on the indigenous voice in order to understand their human suffering and exclusion in the schools. In the current study, the strongest expression of breaking silences of marginalization was clearly seen through Batoul's words—"treat us as human"—in which she called for her right to be accepted as a human being.

In this respect, the transformative actions can be applied through the curriculum, and the teacher–student interaction needs to be examined carefully. According to critical pedagogy, teachers need to act as critical researchers whereby they listen attentively to what their students have to say about their communities and cultural backgrounds. By doing so, teachers will be able to understand how students make sense of both their school world and other social worlds. In other words, with critical pedagogy, teachers place great emphasis on the various social contexts in which the teachers pay serious attention to the students' communities, learning environments, and their needs. Within the act of contextualization, teachers grasp the holistic approach in their planning and teaching. The context is complex as it is multidimensional and examines the variety of values of the students' social worlds. This context examination may lead to the use of diverse methods or different interpretations to fully understand the students' social worlds.

In the current study, Rukaya's reaction to her teacher's ignorance regarding the diversity of Muslim women's experiences is a good example of teachers' need to become more aware of the various contexts and intersectionality of Muslim women. Rukaya instead took it upon herself to play the role of the intellectual who educated her peers about the various factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and location that influenced the identities of Muslim women. Another example was when Zeina talked about the lack of positive representations of Muslims in the curriculum. She also played the role of the intellectual and made this connection to her heritage by validating the knowledge of Muslim medieval history. Batoul also questioned the political role of her grade 6 teacher who associated colonization in a North American context (between First Nations and European settlers) with the war between Christians and Muslims during medieval times. To Batoul, the teacher should instead have provided positive examples related to the representations of Muslims in the curriculum rather than negative experiences that may add more tensions and vulnerability. Again, this current research reiterates the limited knowledge teachers have when teaching about others and the discourse of otherizing is highly common in the learning environment of the participants.

There is certainly a need to reexamine the curriculum in order to welcome students from diverse backgrounds. This study invites pre-service programs to provide teacher candidates with real contexts so that they can understand the experiences of others. Specifically, it is important to plan on the inclusion of service learning placements where students can understand as well as build respect and empathy towards minority groups (Skorobohacz & Al-Fartousi, 2011). Service learning placements will provide students with the opportunity to be engaged directly with the different experiences of

minority groups and thus develop a deeper understanding of the challenges that minority groups face in the larger society.

In sum, there is a need for a pedagogy that acknowledges the factors that impact the construction of Shi'i Muslim identities. These factors are related to the intersectionality of religion, ethnicity and race, gender, spirituality, and emotion of Shi'i Muslim females. The contextualized curriculum is enhanced by the holistic approach and critical pedagogy in which students gain critical consciousness of their world and the teachers act as intellectual researchers who continue to listen carefully to their students' diverse and dynamic needs that are based on the various contexts. Finally, this research provides some recommendations that can play a supportive role in helping to foster positive identities and self-images among minority groups and equity in Canadian settings.

Recommendations for Future Studies

I recommend that more research be conducted about the experiences of Shi'i Muslim females in both diverse and non-diverse settings. The current study demonstrated how the non-diverse setting created more challenges and tensions for Shi'i Muslim females wearing the Hijab, and this was most evident in the theme that addressed familiarity with wearing the Hijab and acknowledging religious celebrations. The current research examined the experiences of Shi'i Muslim females from Arabic backgrounds. Further research needs to examine the experiences of Shi'i females from non-Arabic backgrounds and the role of various ethnicities and languages on young Shi'i females' understanding of the meaning of the Hijab and their experiences in their various social worlds (Takim, 2009). Due to the diversity of Shi'i groups, new research must carefully

examine the intersectionality of race, class, religion, ethnicity, and gender in order to reduce the potential for generalizations and misunderstandings.

Future research needs to also examine the roles of mothers and minority communities on the identity development of first- and second-generation of Shi'i Muslim youth in Canada. I also underscore here the important role of insiders in conducting research on Shi'i minority groups. Due to the complex challenges faced by this particular group, insider researchers will better understand the sensitivity and the intersectionality of various elements that influence the Muslim community. I also recommend collaborative research from scholars in various fields in order to better address the complexity and the diversity of this group. Future research may include schools as important sites for observations in order to gain deeper insights about the experiences of young girls coming to terms with wearing the Hijab in the school context.

Final Thoughts

I do not intend in this thesis nor in the overall body of my work to generalize the experience of all Shi'i Muslim female students in Canada; instead, I sought to provide insights into the complexities and the experiences associated with minority Shi'i Muslim females in their social worlds. Nonetheless, this research has implications for educators interested learning more about this group. Simply put, this research points to the undercutting structure faced by the minority Shi'i Muslim female students in non-diverse settings. Equally important, this research acknowledges the important role of the Muslim community in non-diverse settings.

As an insider researcher, I realize how my epistemology associated with critiquing and reconstructing knowledge has shifted to add new layers of balancing my religious

beliefs with my academic ones. Further, my awareness of my religious identity and the research-based knowledge focusing on women of colour's tensions encourages me to utilize both my professional and religious backgrounds to document this research. I documented the critical roles of context and experience in shaping Shi'i Muslim females' behaviours. My reflexivity allows me to reflect upon my marginality in terms of gender and religion and privilege as a doctoral student. The process of writing this research helped me to reconcile many of my fears and pains from my own experiences of marginalization. This research acts as a healing process from my cultural memories that were filled with many traumatic, oppressive incidents related to my Shi'i religious doctrine. Although there were moments of emotional pain due to the participants' challenges that reminded me of mine, I employed a reflexive dialogical approach which transformed me into an active participant, whereby I became more open-minded towards multiple points of view. Through my academic experiences, I gained valuable insights about my reconstructed identity as a female Muslim educator who seeks strategies to allow her and her group to be genuinely accepted in the Western world.

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Appendix A

Interview/Meetings Questions

Some of the questions that guided the individual interviews and the focus meeting with the participants were as follows:

The Participants' Own Social World(Community, home)	The Participants' Social World of the Dominant group (school, peer, teachers)
<p>Social and Religious Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your friends. • Describe your social activities and events that you like to attend. • When did you (or will you) first start to wear the Hijab? Why? • How do you feel when you wear the Hijab? • Does your mother wear the Hijab? Why? • Do you have a sister? Does she wear the Hijab? When did she first wear the Hijab? • Do you have brothers? How did they treat you once you started wearing the Hijab? If so how? Can you give an example? • How do you see yourself as a Shi'i Muslim? • Why do you wear the Hijab? • When do you wear the Hijab? When don't you wear the Hijab? • How do the stories/characters of Imam Hussein's family make you feel about wearing the Hijab? Why? • What do you do when you go to the mosque in Ashura (e.g., A holy Islamic month)? • How do you dress to the Majlis? • Do you like to attend Matam and why? • How do you feel about the images of Muslims? Have you observed any of these in school? Outside of school? 	<p>Social Values (Peers, teachers):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your friends. • Describe your social activities and events that you like to attend. • How do you see yourself as a girl? • What are some of the experiences other Muslim girls have with regard to their participation in public schools after wearing the Hijab? • How did you feel about wearing the Hijab in your school(classroom, playgrounds)? • Are there any books in your school library, classroom dealing with Islam? • How do the stories/characters of Imam Hussein's family make you feel about wearing the Hijab in the school? Why? • What are your experiences in your school as a Muslim girl with theHijab? Please explain. • Are there any changes you would like to see in your school after wearing the Hijab? • What are your experiences in your school as a Muslim girl before the Hijab? • How do you feel about the images of Muslims? Have you observed any of these in school? Outside of school? <p>School Policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your public school celebrate/ acknowledge Islamic holidays? If so, what in particular do they do and what are your feelings about this? • How does the school deal with bullying?

Appendix B

Verbal Script

Proposed Date of Study: May 12 to May 30, 2012

Dear (Name) or Hello (Name):

My name is May Al-Fartousi and I am currently enrolled in the Joint PhD program at Brock University. My Faculty supervisor is Dr. Dolana Mogadime.

The reason I am contacting you today is because I am currently co-conducting a very interesting doctoral research on exploring how young female Shi'i-Muslim Canadian students negotiate their racial, cultural, and religious identities associated with wearing the Hijab (headscarf) within the contexts of homogeneous public elementary schools, where the majority of the students are White. Since you have a daughter in the public elementary school, I am interested in your daughter's experiences.

The title of the study is, "Unveiling Shi'i Religious Identities: Case Studies of Hijab in Culturally Homogeneous Canadian Schools." I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, file # 10-243. However the final decision about participation is yours. The participants will be recruited through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008) based on five criteria: (a) all of the families are religious; (b) all of the students must have been born in Canada so they attend regular classroom settings (I prefer that students attend regular classrooms due to my research focus on religious and cultural identities rather than language issues); (c) the students attend public schools that comprise mostly White students; (d) the students must be currently wearing the Hijab; and (e) all the participants are between 9-12 years old.

The formats will be one open-ended individual interview and one focus-group meeting in our community. Please be advised that the pre-teen and teenaged years are a time of self-discovery and identity formation that can be stressful, so the participants should keep in mind that there are people that they can talk to about issues if needed such as parents, teachers, and spiritual leaders; and that I can help them connect with resources, if requested. There may be a follow-up interview with your daughter after the focus group meeting. Your daughter will be invited to participate in one semi-structured individual interview and one focus group-meeting with other young girls from our community. Each interview and meeting would last about one hour, and would be arranged for a time convenient to your daughter's schedule. Involvement in the interviews and focus-group

meeting is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. The interview and focus group-meeting questions will focus on the experiences of living between the Western and the Muslim cultures, mainly the schooling experiences associated with wearing the Hijab for your daughter as a young female Shi'i-Muslim Canadian student attending school settings where the majority of the students are not Muslim.

Your daughter may decline to answer any of the interview questions she does not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at any time. With your permission the interview and the focus- group meeting will be tape recorded and transcribed by me for analysis. Your daughter will have the opportunity to preview the transcripts as soon as they are transcribed. All information she provides will be considered confidential. In rare cases, it will not be possible to ensure confidentiality due to mandatory reporting laws (e.g., suspected child abuse).

The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of within three years. After all the data have been analyzed, your daughter will receive an executive summary of the research results.

If this is something that may be of interest to your daughter, I would like to send you an information package that provides you with more specific details. Please note that receiving the information package does not mean you are under any obligation to participate. Once you and your daughter read the materials, if your daughter decides that she may like to be involved, you can contact Dr. Dolana Mogadime if you have further inquiries and/or proceed with signing the consent forms.

Thank you and your daughter for her consideration to participate in this study.

Dr. Dolana Mogadime, Associate Professor
Brock University, Graduate and Undergraduate Studies
Faculty of Education
St. Catharines, Ontario
Canada L2S 3A1
Telephone: (905) 688-5550 ext. 3733
Fax: (905) 641-5091
Email: Dolana.Mogadime@brocku.ca

May Al-Fartousi
BA, M.Ed., PhD. Candidate,
Faculty of Education
Brock University
Email: ma04nj@brocku.ca